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including BLACK MASK MAGAZINE October 1955

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 26, No. 4, Whole No. 143, OCT., 1955. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 471 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879. *Copyright, 1955, by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A.*

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We have given you our own high opinion of Georges Simenon's work so often that we think the time has come to tell you what others say and feel about the man who has already written more than 350 books. For example, here is an American critic's shrewd appraisal and comments: John K. Hutchens of the "New York Herald Tribune" wrote: Are we not all agreed that "this astonishing, prolific, many-sided writer is an artist? . . . with a swift, austere, impersonal style precisely suited to the demands made upon it . . . They now call his stories simenons, and that's eminence for you — a writer's name as a generic term for his work . . . his observer's eye for detail, weather, clothes, customs, food, all the revealing 'little facts,' as Stendhal called them, is wonderfully true."

And now let us hear from an anonymous critic on the "London Sunday Times": "Ordinary readers buy Simenon's books 'as they buy their daily bread' [certainly more true, we would say, in France than in America, or even in England] . . . in recent years eminent literary men have saluted his incisive style, and the clear-sighted, compassionate humanity which informs his writing."

And now we bring you one of Simenon's Little Doctor stories — one never previously published in the United States. You won't penetrate easily to the real secret in this story — not until the end, or very near it. For this tale not only reveals Simenon's individual style, his grasp of telling detail, and his compassion for people, it also demonstrates his flair for plot; indeed, this story of a private investigator who gets "into a dead man's skin" is one of Simenon's most ingenious detective puzzles.

THE LITTLE DOCTOR AND THE SLIPPER FIEND

by GEORGES SIMENON

(translated by Frances Frenaye)

HE ALWAYS CAME AT A QUARTER past 6 — a pot-bellied little man with beads of perspiration on his forehead which he wiped with a colored handkerchief as he made his preliminary round of the shoe-and-slipper section of the department store. It was a big store, near the

Copyright, 1943, by Librairie Gallimard; originally titled "L'Amoureux aux Pantoufles," from the book "Le Petit Docteur"

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Opéra, and at this hour a great mass of people surged out onto the sidewalks, while the streets were packed with jerkily advancing cars, ten abreast.

Inside, elevators darted ceaselessly up and down and customers bumped against one another, each one trying to get waited on before closing time. Only this one placid little man, who looked as if he must live off a modest pension of some kind, failed to share the general excitement and seemed unaware that at half-past 6 shopping hours were over. The slipper section was near the C entrance, and when the little man sat down, Gaby the shoe clerk gave a resigned sigh.

"What will it be today?" she asked, trying to maintain the appearance of a polite sales transaction, although it was time to freshen her make-up and prepare to go home rather than try slippers on a customer who was unquestionably a lunatic.

"A soft slipper, something in brown . . ."

"The same as yesterday, is that it?"

"No, the ones you showed me yesterday had too thick a sole."

Every day for the past week things had gone on this same way. The customer looked at Gaby with the disarming shyness of a man in love. As she brought over a pile of boxes he pulled off his left shoe.

"How about these?"

"The color's a bit light. . . . Haven't you anything darker?"

By now Gaby — and the other girls too — knew that it would continue like this until the very last minute. He would try on a dozen or more pairs of slippers before making a final choice. Then, just as the closing bell rang, he would go over to the cash register, with the box under his arm. Gaby had even thought up a trick to discourage him once and for all. She asked Antoinette, who worked in the adjacent leather-goods section, to come over and say audibly:

"I just saw your fiancé walking by. . . ." And Antoinette had added, out of her own head: "Is he as jealous as ever?"

But the pot-bellied little customer did not bat an eyelash. He remained a model of patience and good nature. And another stratagem, which was considerably more cruel, had the same lack of effect. When Gaby forced his feet, with the aid of a shoehorn, into a pair of slippers far too small for him, he only winced but did not say a word. It seemed as if he would keep coming in for weeks and months, perhaps even for years — to buy a pair of slippers every day just before it was time for the store to close.

There were tears in Gaby's eyes as she looked at the chair where her admirer always sat, and she said to the Little Doctor:

"It was the day before yesterday . . . I didn't know what other slippers to show him . . . And meanwhile a grouchy woman with a little boy was waiting for me to take care of her. I stooped to pick up some boxes underneath this counter. With-

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out raising my head I took his foot in one hand, while I held a blue slipper in the other. Then suddenly I had a funny feeling. I raised my head and my first thought was that he had fallen asleep, because his chin was resting on his chest. I leaned over and shook him and his full weight fell onto my shoulders. He collapsed like a sack of potatoes. . . . I screamed and people rushed over. The watchman said: 'Air! Fresh air! Probably it's his heart! Because people do have heart attacks here every once in a while. But that wasn't it at all. As they were loosening his tie and collar they saw blood on his shirt and realized that a bullet had gone into his chest. . . . Yes, right here, in this crowded store! And nobody even heard a gun! He must have been dead while I was trying on the slipper. . . . It made me sick, I tell you. I've asked to be transferred to another section. Every time I look at that chair. . . ."

When the Little Doctor — Dr. Jean Dollent, to give him his proper name — had arrived in Paris that morning, Inspector Lucas had already made an on-the-spot investigation. He took the Little Doctor first to the toy department on the third floor. This department was located near the rail of the balcony, overlooking the ground-floor department of shoes and slippers.

"The shot was fired from here," the Inspector explained. "Down there — two floors down — is the chair where the victim was sitting. I've questioned the clerks and they remember noticing a young man wandering about among the toys. In fact, one of the clerks asked if he could serve him and the young man answered: 'I'm waiting for my wife!' It was about a quarter past 6, and the fellow seemed to be interested in toy weapons. He picked up several 'Eureka' pistols. . . . Now, do you see how he did it? He must have had in his pocket, or in a brief case or parcel of some kind, a compressed-air pistol of deadly accuracy, perhaps with a silencer attached. Because no revolver could kill a person at this distance, and a rifle would have been too noticeable. There are pistols, you know, which at 50 yards are quite deadly. . . . And so the murderer handled the toys with an innocent air. Even when he was pretending to aim a gun, no one was surprised, or really paid any attention. The bell that rings to announce closing-time is very powerful and sets off a certain amount of confusion among both clerks and customers.

"No one heard the shot of an air-pistol or one with a silencer. . . . The management of the store is terribly upset and anxious to do all that is humanly possible to catch the culprit. That is why we were asked to recommend a private detective able to conduct an investigation supplementing our own. I gave your name and address, which goes to show that I'm not too jealous of the honors you've won. . . . Now go to it, Doctor, and good luck to you!"

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The young general manager of the store strode nervously up and down his office, shooting an occasional doubtful glance in the direction of Doctor Dollent. Why in the world didn't the Little Doctor build up people's confidence by adopting some mannerism peculiar to himself alone, such as wearing a monocle or smoking cigarettes of an exotic brand? His small stature, tight-fitting clothes, and the youthful way with which he bore his 30-odd years made him seem more like a college student than an experienced crime investigator.

"Look here," said the manager. "The police think it was a professional job. I only wish it were. But I can't see why a regular criminal should have it in for a poor fellow who was obviously off his trolley. For my part, I'm afraid the killing was the work of a madman. You know, of course, that big stores, like newspaper offices and public buildings, attract lunatics of all kinds. And if my theory is correct, *the madman is bound to shoot again*. Such things happen in waves, and no matter how many precautions are taken, there isn't much that can be done. The newspaper accounts have already hurt our business — yesterday there were hardly any sales in the slipper department or its vicinity. A crowd of sensation-seekers were constantly milling about, but without ever approaching too closely . . . So go ahead with your investigation, Doctor. I don't know your methods, and I'm told you haven't any. But here's a card authorizing you to go anywhere in the store and interview all our employees . . . But perhaps I should first introduce you to Alice of our jewelry department. She made a statement to me last night that I wish her to repeat in your presence. Of course, I don't put much stock in what women say. I know how their imaginations usually run away with them . . ."

The manager sent for Alice, who proved to be a tall, pale girl with eyes and manner that suggested, just as the manager had said, that she was prey to a vivid imagination. Obviously she read trashy novels and doted on moving-picture stars.

"Will you repeat to this gentleman . . . ?"

The girl was noticeably disturbed and spoke with nervous volubility.

"Well, as I told . . . well, I saw the picture in the paper, because on the actual day of the crime I was off duty. As soon as I saw the picture I recognized him. Before he began giving Gaby trouble, I was the one he . . ."

"What do you mean?" asked the little Doctor. "Did he make propositions to you?"

"No — not that. But for several days — I might be able to look up the exact number — he came to my department . . ."

"At a quarter past 6?"

"Between 5 and 6 . . . Of course, customers often come just to see us girls — we catch on to that fast enough. First of all, they make a small purchase. Well, he had a watch-chain with him and said he was looking for

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a snap-hook. I showed him a dozen or more and finally he bought one. He came back the next day and said the hook had broken, through his own fault. I didn't swallow that, because I knew the hook wouldn't break in one day. Well, he talked around and about it for some time and finally bought another . . . ."

"And did he come back the next day at the same time?"

"Yes, it must have been for two whole weeks that he came every afternoon to buy a snap-hook."

"Didn't it ever occur to you that he might be a thief?"

"Yes, it did. My first thought was that he might be a shoplifter. I kept my eye on him and asked a store detective to do the same while I was busy looking for what he wanted."

"And then?" prodded Dollent.

"That's all," and Alice sighed with relief.

"Tell me one thing more," the Little Doctor persisted. "Where is your department located?"

"Oh, yes, it's on the second floor — just above slippers and just below toys. That fact struck me too, when I read about it in the paper. I asked to see the manager . . . ."

A few seconds later, after Alice had left, the manager said to the Little Doctor:

"I'm sceptical, as I told you. But I gave the police the gist of her statement and asked them to check on her. It seems that for several weeks now, valuable pieces have been disappearing from her department . . ."

"Is that unusual?"

"Oh, we expect a certain number of thefts, and the average is always pretty much the same, except during the holidays when thieves make a killing . . . But the quantity and value of what's been missing lately from the jewelry department are particularly high . . ."

It was almost terrifying to come out of the manager's office and lean over the great well of the store, which was as big as a ship and buzzing with the voices of the crowd below. How in the world was the Little Doctor to begin? He shrugged his shoulders, stepped into an elevator, and a minute later was walking along the Chaussée-d'Antin. There, with the same rapidity as if he were taking aspirin, he swallowed two glasses of brandy. Then he proceeded to the Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, number 67. He was just about to knock at the concierge's window when he saw Police Inspector Lucas interviewing her inside.

For the dead man had now been identified. He was Justin Galmet, 48 years old, no known profession, domiciled for the last twenty years at the Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, number 67.

"Do you want to question her too?" suggested Inspector Lucas, opening the door. "Otherwise, you can go up with me to Galmet's apartment."

The house was typical of middle-class Paris, or rather of the Montmartre section. It was an old building, whose dark, dingy halls were filled

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with kitchen odors and the shrill sound of children's voices and blaring radios. The apartment was on the fifth floor, facing the courtyard. Its three rooms were furnished in heavy provincial style; a canary cage hung in the middle of the window and there was a pot of geraniums on either side.

"Nobody will disturb us," said the Inspector. "The concierge tells me that Justin Galmet never had any visitors. He was an old bachelor, with fussy ways. She claims that she came up once a week to give the place what she calls a thorough cleaning, but I imagine she actually did very little. Most of the time Galmet made his own bed and cooked his own breakfast and lunch. He went out around 2 o'clock in the afternoon and came back at 9, usually with his arms full of parcels. Then he dined at a little restaurant on the corner of the Rue Lepic. I've already called the place and found that he was a familiar figure there. He had a table reserved near the window and treated himself to delicacies of various kinds. He ate his dinner slowly, while reading the evening papers, wound up with a cup of coffee and a liqueur, and then went quietly home . . . But I have something much more startling to tell you . . ."

Here Inspector Lucas paused to weigh the effect of his words upon the Little Doctor.

"I found Justin Galmet's name in our files," Lucas continued, "not as a criminal but as a member of the Force. He joined up 25 years ago and served for four years before resigning. Someone had left him some money, he stated, and his intention was to live on the income from it. I turned up some fellows who used to know him and asked them about him. They described him as a lonely, taciturn sort. He was inclined to be lazy and used to sit for hours over a bottle of beer. And even then he had developed a taste for good food. A man fated to be a bachelor . . . Now, shall we look over the premises together?"

Galmet's apartment was not exactly clean, but neither was it as disorderly as a man living alone might have left it. Dollent began by giving food and drink to the canary. The open window afforded the traditional view of the rooftops of Paris, gleaming in the sun. Lucas had opened a big old wardrobe and now he called out to his companion:

"Look here! This is full of parcels that haven't even been untied. From different stores . . . Do you want to help me cut the strings?"

The two men proceeded to do the unpacking. They found not only many pairs of slippers, but a number of other heterogeneous objects as well: earthenware plates, cuts of rayon material, combs, toothbrushes, bottles of hair tonic, and a collection of pipes, although the concierge had said that Galmet was not a smoker. In most cases, the price tags were still attached.

"What do you make of it, Doctor?" the Inspector asked.

"I don't think he was a shoplifter. None of these things has sufficient

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value to justify theft. Nor was he a kleptomaniac — you've noticed they were all carefully wrapped and many of them had a cashier's check tucked under the string."

"Do you think Galmet had an abnormal passion for shopgirls and made these purchases simply to have an excuse for talking to them? In the long run, that would involve his spending a lot of money. The slippers alone cost him over a thousand francs a day. And he couldn't afford to be that extravagant . . . Shall I give you my honest opinion?"

Inspector Lucas paused, and when Dollent nodded the Inspector went on: "Don't be too cocky over what I am going to say. I know your methods by now and I know under what circumstances each of us works better. Well, to be frank this is your kind of case. There's something — well, pathological about it. Galmet's not the type we're accustomed to deal with. And his murderer quite terrifies me with his cold-blooded assurance . . ."

Instead of thanking Lucas for the compliment, the Little Doctor gave a deep sigh.

"You're not too keen about the case either?" queried the Inspector.

"Not until I have something to go on — some clue, some sign . . . I can't for the life of me fathom . . ."

"If there's anything I can do . . ."

"Yes, there's one thing. I'd like you to find out from the various stores where he bought these things whether he always came back for several days in succession and whether he went to the same clerk every time."

It was a good thing that the Little Doctor didn't mind making a fool of himself. He wasn't bothered by the fact that the clerks at the neighboring counters, who must have been warned of his little game, neglected their customers and looked over at him, nudging one another, some of them stifling a giggle at his expense.

He had eaten a good lunch, topped by coffee and liqueur, and had ordered a couple of cocktails in anticipation of the next meal. What did the case add up to? A man was dead, and nobody knew a thing about him. Indeed a duller and yet more mysterious individual would have been hard to imagine. Galmet had not a single friend or relation, and appeared to have lived in complete solitude. And yet it was to someone's interest that he should die. The only established fact — the only leg he could stand on, as the Little Doctor put it to himself — was that Justin Galmet had gone to quite a few stores, each for a certain number of days in succession, and had bought the same articles from the same clerk every day, articles for which he had no use and simply stuffed into his wardrobe.

It was a quarter past 6, and Dollent was sitting with his left shoe off in the very chair in which Galmet had died. He said to Gaby:

"Repeat exactly the same motions you went through with the man who was killed."

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"You mean I am to try to fit you with a pair of slippers?" she asked, moving clumsily because of her reawakened fear.

"Just so — with the same motions and even the same rhythm."

"Should I try to hurt you, too?" she said with a feeble smile.

The Little Doctor surveyed the scene. Glancing upward, he saw part of the jewelry department on the second floor. He recognized Alice, who looked down at him from time to time over the railing. Just above her were the toys, among them a miniature soldier's outfit with two pistols. These were not dangerous weapons, however, because they only shot toy arrows. Because of his angle of vision he could see no more of the upper floors than the gilded railings running around them.

"Oh! I hear music," he observed, at the same time screwing his face into a grimace because the slipper Gaby was trying on was too small. "Is that a regular feature?"

"Don't speak to me about it! It's the hardest thing in the world to get used to, and it goes on all day long. When it's quiet music, I don't mind so much, but at this hour they put on two-steps and marches in order to quicken the customers' pace and speed them on their way. And the jazz! . . . Shall I keep trying on the slippers?"

The Little Doctor's eyes ran over the main floor. Just in front of him there was a bargain counter, where every week a different item was on display. To his left was a cashier's cage, marked "No. 89" and, just behind that, a gilded door opening onto the crowded sidewalk.

"Why is this part of the shop more crowded than . . . ?" he started to ask, suddenly guessing the answer when he noticed a subway entrance just outside.

"I've tried on six pairs . . ." Gaby was saying.

"And how many did you try on him?"

"Sometimes as many as seven. Once nine, as I remember."

"What made the difference?"

"I don't know."

It certainly wasn't the slippers, for Justin Galmet had never even taken them out of the boxes, much less worn them. A sudden thought caused the Little Doctor to smile. He had just lowered his eyes. Could it be that? . . . No! That wasn't sufficient reason for killing a man. It was true, however, that as Gaby leaned over to try on the slippers, the opening of her dress slipped down, affording a view of her breasts . . . After all, Galmet had gone previously to the jewelry department and Alice didn't have to lean over to show him her wares. And in other shops Galmet had made entirely different purchases — innocuous ones.

"You'll have to make up your mind," Gaby was repeating. "The closing bell's about to ring."

Sure enough, a loud clang filled the spacious store with its vibrations. Customers made for the doors, clerks

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bustled about, and floorwalkers, in their black jackets and boutonnieres, darted around like sheep dogs, saying: "Closing time, ladies and gentlemen — time to go home!"

At the cashier's cage, last-minute purchases were being rung up. The cashier put down a big yellow envelope in order to rake in a handful of francs.

"Will you take these, then?" Gaby was asking.

"Those or any others . . ."

The Little Doctor insisted in seeing the experiment through. *If only he could get himself into the dead man's skin* — and discover what he had been looking at from this particular vantage point on the preceding days! That was the crucial question.

Meanwhile, Gaby was slipping on his left shoe.

"This way," she said.

He was about to ask her why she was leading him in a direction opposite to that of the exit when he saw the reason for himself. The cashier of "No. 89" was emerging from her cage with a yellow envelope in her hand, and above the cage itself hung a sign saying *Closed*.

"Come with me," said Gaby. "Only the central cash register is still open."

The Little Doctor, taking in every detail of the scene around him, almost lost track of the young woman who was leading him against the tidal wave of outgoing customers.

"Thirteen hundred and sixty francs," said the central cashier.

Turning around to look over his shoulder, the Little Doctor thought he saw the cashier from "No. 89" about to enter an elevator with the yellow envelope still in her hand. Gaby put a parcel into his hand and looked at him anxiously, as if wondering whether he had discovered some clue. Dollent shrugged his shoulders and dug into his pocket for the sixty francs in small change.

"Will you be back tomorrow?" Gaby asked him curiously.

"Perhaps . . . Yes, I think I will."

Once outside, the Little Doctor was so at a loss what to do with the slippers that he took advantage of the swirling crowd to drop them on the sidewalk . . .

"Hello," said a voice on the telephone shortly after he had reached his hotel. "Inspector Lucas speaking. We've traced Galmet's bank account to the branch of the Crédit Lyonnais nearest to the place where he was living. He seems to have deposited about ten thousand francs a week, except for a dozen or so deposits of as much as 50,000. The deposits have been spread out over the last twenty years . . . Hello . . . Are you there?"

"Yes, go on."

"But in the last three months his weekly deposits were considerably larger than usual. 350,000 francs last week; 150,000 the week before; 100,000 the week before that. And in the two preceding months around 50,000 francs every week . . ."

"Well, well — that adds up to quite a pile!"

"Yes, and the way he accumulated

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it is quite irregular. His net assets after the last twenty years are some 3,000,000 francs, because of course he had also made withdrawals. Then he added about 1,500,000 francs in the last three months alone. And that's not the whole story. An individual has just come to us and said that he's a real estate agent. About ten days ago Justin Galmet went to his office on the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Martin and told him that he was looking for a little house in the country, preferably on the Loire River. They had got to the point of negotiating for the purchase of a house worth between two and three million francs, in the vicinity of Cléry. In fact the deed was to be drawn up next week."

"Did Galmet go to look the place over?"

"Yes, last Tuesday. He went in a taxi, which must have set him back quite a bit of money, in the company of a pretty young woman, who obviously looked upon this as her future home."

"And you're holding out on her name in order to give me a surprise . . ."

"How did you guess it?"

"Never mind, out with it! Gaby? . . ."

"You're very close. But it's someone even more unexpected. And I know it for certain. While you were walking off with your parcel a short time ago, I waited at the exployees' exit with my real estate agent. He identified her without any trouble, especially since he had spotted from a distance her mustard-color coat . . ."

"Well then . . ."

"Alice! The girl from the jewelry department. Look here, Doctor, I don't want to hurt your feelings or disappoint you. But, contrary to what I told you earlier in the day, I'm beginning to believe that this case is up our alley after all. Do you follow what I mean? It looks like the simple matter of a policeman turned thief . . . Hello . . . Why don't you say something? Have I rubbed you the wrong way?"

"Me?"

"Then, for heaven's sake, say something! I'm still at my office. Will you come have a drink with me before going to bed?"

"No, thanks."

"Sure you're not angry?"

"Sure!"

Now Lucas was the one who had nothing to say. Warm-hearted fellow that he was, he couldn't bear to offend the Little Doctor.

"You'll beat me to it another time," the Inspector went on. "Meanwhile, do you want to have some fun? I've summoned this girl, Alice, to my office for tomorrow morning. I don't know whether we'll have to get tough with her, but it may prove an interesting session."

"Good night."

"Will you come tomorrow morning?"

"Perhaps. Good night. Right now I'm terribly sleepy."

And this was quite true, for as usual, when he was called in on an

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investigation, the Little Doctor had tucked away more drinks than were good for him.

It was by sheer chance that the Little Doctor boarded the same subway car as Alice. It was the rush hour and the car was so crowded that he could study her unobserved.

"I wonder what a girl like her was thinking about when she tried to lie her way out of trouble and then suddenly finds herself called up before the police," he said to himself.

Alice's thoughts couldn't have been any too gay. Unlike the lively Gaby, she had a somewhat melancholy disposition. She was just as pretty as the next girl, but she was the kind who takes life seriously. This morning her eyes were red, and since she did take things so hard it must have been because she had cried a good part of the night. Her make-up was carelessly smudged and her hair in some disorder. She lived in a furnished room, near the Rue Lamarck, and the Little Doctor wondered whether she had even bothered to stop somewhere for a roll and a cup of coffee on the way.

"But I'm not going to worry my head about her," he mumbled to himself as he left the subway at the Pont-Neuf station.

It was a magnificent day, with the sunlight bubbling like champagne as it dispelled the haze rising up from the Seine. Alice walked quickly, without turning around. She hesitated for a moment before Police Headquarters, and then finally walked by the officer on guard and up the dusty steps. When the Little Doctor saw her again, it was through the windows of the waiting-room. He went straight to Inspector Lucas's office.

"Look here," he said. "You said something about getting tough . . . Don't be too hard on the girl. She seems to be in a bad state already."

"Show her in," Lucas said gruffly to one of his subordinates.

The Inspector was in a very good humor. Spring was pouring through his windows and he was wearing an unusually bright polka-dot tie. If he was trying to be brutal, it was with a twinkle in his eye.

"Sit down, Mademoiselle. I must tell you from the start that this is a very serious matter. You may be in real trouble."

At once her eyes filled with tears, and she dabbed at them with a soggy handkerchief.

"Yesterday, you didn't tell us all you know. And you also gave false testimony, which falls under Article . . . under some article of the law."

"But I thought . . ."

"What did you think?"

"I thought no one would ever find out about our . . . relationship. I've been so upset by all that has happened . . ."

"How long had you known Justin Galmet?"

"For about three weeks."

"And you became his mistress so quickly?"

"Oh, no, sir! I can swear on the heads of my little brothers . . ."

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"Whose heads did you say?"

"The heads of my little brothers. I'm all alone in the world with the two of them. One of them is at school and the other in an orphanage . . ."

"But I fail to see the connection between them and Justin Galmet."

"I'll explain. If it had been for myself alone, I'd never have paid any attention to him. He was too old for me and not my kind . . ."

"Excuse me. Let's begin at the beginning . . . You first met him in the store?"

"Yes, in my own department. As I told you before, he came every day to buy a snap-hook for his watch-chain. He was very proper, or else I'd never have listened to him. I'm not sure now, but then he seemed to me a perfectly respectable person . . . On the third or fourth day he said timidly, 'Mademoiselle, are your affections engaged?' I told him that the responsibility of my two little brothers would probably never allow me to marry."

The Little Doctor noticed that the Inspector had fallen into a kindly manner and barely raised his voice to ask:

"So the third or fourth time you saw him, this total stranger was making propositions, is that it?"

"That's hard to say . . . He wasn't like the rest. He was very gentle and he told me that he'd always been very much alone."

"Did he tell you all this while you were showing him snap-hooks?"

"No, he asked me to have lunch with him at a little place on the Chaussée d'Antin. He told me that his life was about to take a new turn, that he was going to inherit some money . . ."

The Little Doctor and the Inspector exchanged looks. Justin Galmet seemed to have had inheritances on the brain. Hadn't he said the same thing when he left the police force?

"He wanted to settle down in the country, preferably on the Loire, and he asked whether, if he found a suitable house, I'd marry him. Then he said that my little brothers could live with us and he'd give them a good education."

Alice was crying audibly now, but it was hard to tell whether it was because of fear or sorrow.

"That's the kind of a man he was," she went on. "I asked for a day off to go see the house at Cléry, and all the way out he behaved quite properly. 'A few days from now,' he told me, 'there'll be nothing to keep me in Paris. We can apply for a marriage license' . . ."

"Just one thing, Mademoiselle," said the Inspector. "Weren't you surprised when your new fiancé stopped coming to your department and began directing his attentions to Gaby and her slippers?"

"Yes, on the first day, because he hadn't given me any warning . . . But he swore that he wasn't really interested in her at all and begged me to trust him. As far as that goes, I could watch the two of them from above."

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"And so you thought it was perfectly natural behavior?"

"He'd never spoken to me of his profession, but I imagined he was a . . ."

"A what?"

"A detective. We're accustomed to seeing them about the store. When I learned of his death, my first thought was for my little brothers. I'd already told them we were going to live in the country."

Did Inspector Lucas really need to blow his nose? In any case he did so.

"Are you sure that this time you have told us the whole truth?"

"I believe so. That's all I remember."

"Didn't your fiancé ever say anything else that revealed his character to you?"

"He was always appealing and quite proper," she repeated. "In spite of the difference in our ages I felt sure he wouldn't make me unhappy."

The Little Doctor said to himself that in another minute she'd harp again on her little brothers. But at this point Lucas cut her short.

"You can go now, Mademoiselle," he told her. "If I need to see you again, I'll send for you."

"And I won't get into trouble?"

She could hardly believe that it was over, that she was free to leave the building into which she had entered so fearfully.

"I don't know how to thank you, Inspector. If you only realized . . ."

"Very well. Goodbye."

He practically pushed her out the door, and when he came back and shut it behind him, his face betrayed involuntary emotion.

"Well, I wasn't too much of a brute, was I?" he asked the Little Doctor.

"I was just thinking how different events appear from different points of view," the Little Doctor answered. "It's a little bit the way it is in the theater. On one side you have the audience, who *believe* in the action played out before them, and on the other the actors and stage-hands, who are readying costumes and scenery. To this girl, for instance, Justin Galmet's death has all sorts of sentimental meanings; to us it's a mystery, a problem to be solved . . . How do you size the fellow up in the light of what we've just heard?"

Lucas merely shrugged his shoulders. The day before, Justin Galmet had been one more of the strange characters that people every big city. Now there was something positively touching about him. Had he really meant to marry the virtuous Alice and take her little brothers to live with him in the country? And if so, why had a bullet wiped out his plan on the very eve of its accomplishment? For he had said: "A few days from now there'll be nothing to keep me in Paris . . ." Days, he had specified, not weeks, after all the years that he had lived there. " 'To keep me in Paris,' " the Little Doctor murmured over and over to himself, as if to wring all possible significance out of these words. That was it! There weren't ten questions to be answered,

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or even two or three; there was only one, so obvious as to seem stupid. *What was keeping him in Paris for a few more days?* Once the answer to this was found, the rest would reveal itself automatically.

"Where are you going?" asked Inspector Lucas, lighting his pipe and sitting down at his desk.

"I'm going to have a drink . . . Inspector, do you know why there are so many drunkards?"

"Hm . . . No . . . I suppose . . ."

"Your supposition is probably incorrect. It's because the only cure for a hangover is a hair of the dog that bit you!"

The Little Doctor was whistling to himself as he went out onto the street. He seemed to be a man breathing in the joy of life through every pore, and no one could have guessed that a question as obsessive as a horsefly buzzing before a storm was preying upon him. *What could have kept the fellow in Paris a few days more?* Abruptly he quickened his pace and went straight to the department store, where Gaby and Alice were presiding, as usual, over their respective sections.

"I'm sorry to bother you again, Mademoiselle," he said to Alice. "I'm perfectly proper, too. That's why I'm asking you to lunch with me in a little place on the Chaussée d'Antin. When are you free?"

"At half-past 12."

"Then I'll be waiting for you at the subway entrance."

Dollent had chosen an ordinary little restaurant, and dozens of shop clerks were lunching around them. Alice was not altogether at ease, but the gaiety of her companion, who had downed three drinks before she came, occasionally caused her to smile.

"Don't hesitate to take all the 'extras,' Mademoiselle. The check goes on my expense account, I assure you."

"Have whatever you like best," he continued. "What would you say to some lobster?"

"Lobster makes me break out with a rash," she answered ingenuously.

Someone at the next table was eating her favorite dish, and the smell of it proved irresistible.

"Tripe? Good! I like it myself. Waiter, two orders of tripe."

There are days when the air is washed clean, when the city breaks out into smiling color, when everything is good and beautiful. There in the cheerful little restaurant it seemed impossible that someone should have gone to the toy department with a pistol which unfortunately was no toy and shot a poor fellow having a pair of slippers tried on . . .

"Take it easy, Mademoiselle. I'm only asking you to think things over and see if you can remember certain details, which may not have struck you as important at the time . . . For instance, when was the last time Justin Galmet came to your department?"

The name obviously depressed her and he was half sorry to spoil her enjoyment of a good lunch.

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"It was a Saturday," she said thoughtfully. "I remember it quite well, because that's always a particularly busy day and we're dead on our feet by the end of it."

"A Saturday, then . . . Did Galmet sit down?"

"In my department that's very rare. Occasionally, when a customer looks over a number of items. But he never sat down, to my recollection."

"So from where he stood, he could see the floor below?"

"Yes, he could look down on the slipper department, the bargain counter, the cashier at 'No. 89' and the doors leading out to the street. The same things I see myself every day."

"Now, don't answer my next question too quickly. On that last day, didn't you notice a motion or look of surprise, as if he had suddenly seen a familiar face in the crowd?"

"That I don't know," she said at last. "But there's one thing — he didn't buy a snap-hook that day."

"Ah! You didn't tell us! In other words, he suddenly went away . . ."

"Yes, he went downstairs."

"And nothing else struck you as out of the ordinary?"

He seemed to be hypnotizing her into a remembrance of what had happened. She said reflectively, "I had a lot of customers. For a quarter of an hour or so, I forgot about him. Then, as I was taking someone over to the cashier, I glanced downstairs and saw, to my surprise, that he hadn't yet left the store."

"Where was he, exactly?"

"He was standing not far from Gaby."

"Is that all?"

"I was very busy that day, and on account of the recent thefts, I had to keep an eye on my own department. But I'm practically positive that I caught a glimpse of him again some time later. I shouldn't like you to go by what I can tell you . . . When you're looking down at a crowd of jostling people, you can't be too sure. But I thought I saw him talking to another man."

"Can you describe the other man?"

"No, except that he had on a gray hat . . . After that I didn't see Justin Galmet again until the following Monday, when he went to Gaby's department. He was waiting for me Tuesday, after work, but I didn't want to speak to him. It was then that he told me not to worry about what he was doing and promised he'd explain later. I finally gave in, and we came to have a bite in this same place. Yes, just at this table, to the left of the door. Two days later he took me to see the house. He was very happy, and anxious to move into it . . . What's the matter?"

The Little Doctor had turned so serious and was staring at her with such a frown that she wondered what in the world he had got out of her story.

"What day of the week is this?" he asked brusquely.

"Saturday . . ."

He started, and looked at the dishes

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before them as if he were anxious to see them taken away.

"Will you have some dessert?" he asked, and since she did not dare answer yes, he called for the check. Then without bothering to take her back to the store he jumped into a taxi.

"Quai des Orfèvres . . . Police Headquarters . . . Yes, driver, and hurry!"

"Are you back so soon?" asked the Inspector, looking like a statue beside the jumping-Jack Little Doctor.

"Yes, so soon . . . First of all, give me some figures on the thefts in the big stores."

"That's easy enough. They keep very accurate statistics — accurate and terrifying. One place on the Left Bank calculates its loss by theft at nearly twenty million francs a year. That's why all such stores employ a small army of Private detectives."

"Are the thieves specialists?"

"Yes and no. First of all there are the shoplifters — women and girls who can't afford to buy what they want and just take it. Yard-goods are what they are mostly after. Then come the big battalions of semi-pros — women, too, because they have all sorts of ways of concealing their plunder. They carry shopping bags or have hiding places in their clothes. There was one, I remember, who pretended to be pregnant, and was stuffing things into a sort of kangaroo pouch under her dress. They usually work in pairs, so that one can distract the clerk while the other is stealing. We know a lot of these women but it's difficult to catch them red-handed. They can smell out both the store detectives and our own men, and make their getaway so fast that we can't stop them without raising a terrible rumpus. And that's the last thing the stores want . . ."

"Isn't there any bigger game?"

"Oh, yes," said Lucas with a slightly bored air. "Certain jobs are too daring and clever to have been pulled off by women. But we've never laid our hands on any rings . . ."

"Then there are organized rings?"

"I really don't know. I'd like to say yes, but we haven't the proof."

"And have there been many big jobs in the last few months?"

"Just the normal number, I imagine, that is in the big stores . . ."

He toyed with a paper-knife while the Little Doctor remained tactfully silent. After a pause Lucas rewarded his patience with a sigh.

"Other kinds of robbery have been on the increase," the Inspector admitted. "In specialty and jewelry shops, for instance. A customer sweeps up a handful of jewels and dashes out to a waiting car. You've read about it in the papers. Almost impossible to carry off, you might say, and yet it's done . . . There's psychology in it, an element of surprise. The shopkeepers may be serving other customers at the same time — accomplices in the crime, perhaps — and it takes a minute or two for him to recover his presence of mind and turn

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in the alarm. Outside, it's the same thing. The streets are full of traffic, the getaway car moves swiftly away and before anyone realizes it's gone, leaving confusion behind it. . . . What makes you smile?"

"Did I smile?" said the Little Doctor ingenuously.

"It seems to amuse you."

"Why not? By the way, how many men could you let me have this evening? Men who aren't too well-known, who can pass unnoticed in a crowd."

"It depends on what you want to do with them."

"Perhaps nothing at all, perhaps quite a lot. It all depends on whether my logic holds together. If it's without a flaw, then . . . No, I'll tell you later. If it doesn't come off, I don't want to be a jackass . . . How many men can you spare?"

"Half a dozen?"

"That's not enough. I need at least twice that many. And a fast car, with no indications that it belongs to the police."

"Do you realize that I can't authorize an operation of this importance without consulting the higher-ups?"

"Very well," said Dollent, imperturbably, "go ahead and consult them."

"It's only 6 o'clock, Inspector; we have plenty of time."

"But if something's going to happen, you can't be too sure."

"If anything happens, it will be at exactly half-past 6. Have another glass of beer."

The two men were sitting at an outdoor café table, just across from the department store. A police car was parked, in defiance of all rules and regulations, in front of the nearby subway entrance. The Little Doctor had made all the arrangements, not on the spot, where he might have been noticed, but in the Inspector's office, where he had drawn up a plan as thorough as that of a major military engagement, in which every man had a definite part to play.

"You, redhead: at exactly quarter past 6 you are to go to the slipper department and try on one pair of slippers after another until 6:30, when you will have your eye on cashier 'No. 89'. And you there: you'll treat yourself to a new wallet. . . . Don't worry, Lucas, it's all on the expense account. . . . You must be there when the bell rings, and you'll have your eye on . . ."

And the Little Doctor put *X* marks on the plan of the store.

"Three men near the door, but they mustn't close in until half-past. No use spreading the news that we've set a trap. And three others at the subway entrance."

Dollent had carried out plenty of investigations, but this was the first time he had ever deployed such a large number of plainclothesmen. Inspector Lucas looked at him with a mildly dubious air.

"Is that all?" he asked somewhat ironically.

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"No, I'd like to have one man in the toy department — just as a safety measure. I don't want to come to the same end as Justin Galmet."

Now, at the café table, the Little Doctor, watch in hand, dropped tantalizing hints to the Inspector as they passed the time away.

"If Galmet had been a regular department-store thief, do you think one of his accomplices would have murdered him? Don't answer me too quickly. . . . It doesn't look as if he were really a big-time professional, in view of the amount of money he had in the bank. And only a petty thief would risk arrest for gains of a few thousand francs a week. . . . But, you say, in the course of these last months . . . No, Inspector . . ."

"I didn't say anything!"

"But I know what you were thinking! Four and a half million francs don't come to much after twenty years of thieving, and this insignificant little man doesn't seem the sort to inspire such a cleverly planned crime. There's the basis of the whole thing, the leg to stand on, that I always search for from the start. I made a mistake in pinning my attention on Galmet. *The murderer is the real starting point!* And the fellow that thought up the shooting from the toy department is nobody's fool. I could swear that Galmet saw him from above, while he was talking with Alice. He rushed downstairs. Alice isn't sure that the two actually spoke, and I feel sure that if they did, it was for only a few seconds. Every day after that, Galmet came at quarter past 6 to the slipper department. . . . Doesn't that give you a clue?"

But Lucas merely mumbled: "It's quarter past 6 now."

"One more glass of beer, and we'll be off."

The Little Doctor drained his glass, crossed the street, and went into the store by a side entrance. With Lucas beside him he made his way to the jewelry department on the second floor. Alice looked up anxiously from her customers, but the Little Doctor made a gesture of reassurance.

"There's one man we can't count on to move fast, and that's your redhead," he observed to the Inspector. "Because he has one shoe off, just like Justin Galmet. . . . Now, tell me this: If you planned to rob a bank or office employee, what day of the month would you choose to do it?"

His questions were almost unbearably irritating, but perhaps this was only his way of containing his impatience.

"What day? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. What day of the month would you pick out if you wanted to hold up a bank employee? January 4th, for instance?"

"I don't see . . ."

"Never mind. January 4th would be a very bad choice, because you'd find little on him. He'd just have paid his rent and the Christmas holidays would be only a few days behind. No, the time to rob a white-collar man is directly after pay-day . . . Don't you notice anything around you? . . ."

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Lucas was too annoyed to reply, and the Little Doctor continued to soliloquize:

"The crowd is twice as large as yesterday. It's a crowd of real buyers, and the cash registers are filling up with money."

The Inspector pricked up his ears.

"Do you by any chance mean . . .?"

But his question was interrupted by the bell, which clanged through the whole store, while the piped music struck up a march in order to speed the customers out.

"You'll see," said the Little Doctor. "If something happens it will be very quick. Don't lean over too far, or you'll make yourself conspicuous."

He himself knew exactly what to watch for. The cashier at "No. 89" sealed a big envelope and came out of her cage. The crowd was flowing like a stream of lava among the counters and she had to fight her way through it in order to reach the elevator. Suddenly she cried out, and at the very same moment the Little Doctor detected a pearl-gray hat beside her. What happened next had the appearance of chaos. A woman screamed, and another one, whose child had been knocked over, screamed even louder. Some people, mindful perhaps of the recent murder, stampeded for the doors, while the redhead detective rushed forward, minus his left shoe.

"We needn't bother to hurry down," said the Little Doctor, unable to contain his joy. "We'd only get there too late. If your men do their duty . . ."

The gray hat had disappeared, and the crowd pouring out of the store mingled with the crowd on the sidewalk.

The man with the gray hat was in Inspector Lucas' office, with his face scratched and his collar torn, looking somewhat the worse for wear. He had been nabbed, after a struggle, just as he was slipping into a car parked right in front of the police car itself. But the envelope wasn't on him, and it was not found anywhere along the path he had taken. Who knows how many accomplices had passed it through their hands along the way? He had planned a masterly job and even now he did not lose countenance, although he could not help returning the Little Doctor's penetrating stare.

"Unless I'm mistaken, Inspector, this is the leader of the ring of which you told me."

"Go ahead and see if you can pin anything on me!" said the prisoner. "The cashier can't possibly say that I took the envelope from her. In a crowd like that, it might have been anyone." And there was some reason for his boasting.

"Do you know what particularly impressed me, Inspector?" said the Little Doctor. "The fact that the place where Justin Galmet was sitting when he met his death was a strategic position. First, cashier's cage 'No. 89' is the only one anywhere near a door; second, this door is the one most frequently used, because it is the nearest to the subway entrance. Now it

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was on a Saturday that Galmet came hastily down from the jewelry department. What could he have seen below? This man in the gray hat! *And he knew that the presence of this man meant something was cooking!*"

The Little Doctor was thirsty but he had to soothe his taut nerves with no more than a cigarette.

"When he was on the Force, I'm sure Galmet dealt with thefts of this kind. That's probably what lay behind his resignation. He figured that if every thief gave him a 10 or 20 per cent rake-off . . . Do you see now? He knew their faces, *and he could live off their work instead of turning them in!* Not a very pretty idea, but a clever one. He lived quietly, keeping an eye on his chickens and waiting for them to hatch. While he was making small purchases in the stores, his practiced eye spotted the petty operators. That's how he managed to lead a typical middle-class existence and put 10,000 francs in the bank every week. Until one day he fell on bigger game . . ."

The man in the gray hat looked at the Little Doctor with what Lucas had to grudgingly admit was admiration.

"Don't tell me you're a copper!" he interrupted.

"I'm Jean Dollent, a practicing physician at Marsilly, near La Rochelle," his captor answered politely. "As I was saying, a few months ago Justin Galmet came across this gentleman's ring, which doesn't deal in peanuts. He asked for his percentage, and they couldn't refuse him. His bank deposits increased, and he began to think of retiring to the country. Then something unexpected happened. After years of making eyes at salesgirls, simply in the line of business, he was seriously smitten with the beautiful but melancholy Alice and decided to marry her. He was on the track of a jewel thief, but found a bride instead . . .

"Just at this point he saw the familiar figure of this gentleman downstairs and knowing he must be up to something went to find out what it could be. For several days he returned to the same spot in order to see the job with his own eyes and stake a claim to the profits. Very soon he guessed that the cash envelope from 'No. 89' was the object. On a Saturday night, there might be as much as six million francs in that envelope, and his percentage would help him to buy his country house without using up all his savings. That is *what kept him in Paris for a few more days.* He had to wait until this gentleman actually pulled off the job. Then wedding bells, little brothers, vegetable gardening, and all the rest. He neglected to reckon with only one thing — that this gentleman might be fed up with the squeeze imposed upon him. In fact, our friend here had arranged to bump Galmet off, and the floor plan of the shop worked in his favor. A single pistol shot, and . . ."

The man in the gray hat was now growing excited, when at a sign from Lucas the door opened and the sales-

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man from the toy department walked in.

"That's the fellow," the salesman said promptly. "I didn't see him fire the shot, but that day he was fingering the toy guns, and I am sure . . ."

"Poor chap!" sighed the Little Doctor, as he sat with Lucas over his fourth drink at the station café, waiting for the train to Marsilly. "It was a devilishly clever idea — to prey on thieves and all the while to live so prosaically, cooking his own breakfast . . . Do you know, there's one thing that tempts me to strew flowers on his grave, and that's Alice and her brothers. I'm sure he really meant to marry her, and he would have made them all very happy, there on the banks of the Loire. Alice is really out of luck."

He shook his head sadly.

"How so?"

"Because now she has a very good chance of remaining an old maid!"

And turning to the waiter, he asked: "How much do I owe you?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**VIN PACKER**
TITLE:	***Only the Guilty Run***
TYPE:	Psychological Crime Story
PROTAGONIST:	Charlie Wright, 16 years old
LOCALE:	Washington Heights, New York City
TIME:	Fall semester of high school
COMMENTS:	*A sensitive study of an adolescent boy in love with his English teacher . . . a prize-winning story that will make you stop and think.*

IT WAS A FEW HOURS AFTER DINNER, that cool evening at the beginning of September. Charlie got up from the mauve stuffed chair in the living room and walked into the foyer, opened the closet and grabbed his red wool sweater from the hook. He said nothing to his parents and they said nothing to him. His mother had looked up from her sewing which was spread out in her lap, and smiled tentatively, and Charlie had winked in answer. His father had not taken his eyes from the ball game on the television screen. It was understood that they would not ask him where he was going, or what time he would return. This was his sixteenth summer, and when the new term started at school, Charlie would be a senior. If he wanted to, he could even smoke in front of his family, and he had done so once. In July he had camped out for two weeks with four of his best buddies far up into the Adirondacks. His allowance was increased from two dollars and a half a week to fifteen dollars a month, and as long as he did not run short, he did not have to account for the money. After Labor Day he would go to work from 4 until 8 in Allen's Pharmacy, and open a savings account in the bank where his father was a teller.

Charlie stood in the hallway of the apartment building and pushed the button of the self-operating elevator. Little Billy Crandell's mother was standing in front of 3C yelling, "C'mon now, Billy. It's after 8. Billy, I said hurry!" Billy was trudging up the stairs slowly, dragging his coat on

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the cement steps, his dark eyes sad, his lips pouting. He passed Charlie, and Charlie ruffled the boy's yellow hair and smiled to himself. He could remember when he was only eleven.

Downstairs in the lobby he paused before the large square mirror. He was tall, and not skinny any more. His shoulders were broad, and his legs and arms were muscular, firm. The deep tan gave his face a rugged, masculine look that set off his gray eyes and made his teeth seem very white when he grinned. The close-cropped haircut helped too. He looked older than he had in June. Even though it had only been three months, he *knew* he looked older — acted older too. He wasn't a kid any longer. He was grown up. He was on his own.

Then he thought of her . . . Of course, he had never really stopped thinking of her. Not all summer. He had pretended to himself that she was not important, that she was merely a stage he had gone through, that it did not matter now. But in his heart he knew differently. It was crazy the way he had dreamed of her those days and nights during June, July, amd August. In his sleep he would see her entering the classroom again, smiling with the dimples at her cheeks, her green eyes sparkling, the soft, long, flaxen-colored hair touching her shoulders. He had seen her that way countless times, but when he dreamed of it, he made it different. She called the roll the way she always did, but when she came to his name, she stopped and looked up, searching the room for him. Then, when their eyes met, a wistful expression came over her countenance. She said, "Oh, *there* you are," and the tone in her voice was hallowed and tender. What she was really saying was, "Charlie, Charlie, I've missed you *so!*"

He would wake up from that recurring dream feeling glorious. He would sing *I'll Be Seeing You* in the shower, shine his scuffed-up brown oxfords, and take long walks, humming to himself and watching the sky. It didn't matter that it was only a dream. It didn't matter that Miss Lattimore had never said anything of the kind to him. It was wonderful, wasn't it? He was in love with her. She was his high-school English teacher and she was probably past 27, and he was just sixteen — but that didn't matter either. Those mornings after the dream, he believed only in his love, in Jill — that was her name. Miss Jill Lattimore.

Sometimes he was depressed. He did not always sing or hum or smile or think it was wonderful to be alive. He read poetry — especially the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare — imitating the way she had read them aloud in class.

How like a winter hath my absence been,
From thee —

That was the one he read most of the time, and he would close the book, hold his head in his hands, and say, "Jill!" and then, "Jill! If you only knew . . ."

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Charlie shook his head and stared at the mirror in the lobby of his apartment house where he had been standing, thinking of her. Suddenly he laughed and said to the mirror, "Shakespeare! *Me* like Shakespeare? Ha!" He shrugged his shoulders the way Sid Caesar might have done on television. "Yeah, *me*. Me — Charlie Wright. I like Shakespeare, that's all. And because of her!" He laughed again, but his stomach did a flip, and when he walked out the door of the building, he was frowning.

It was getting dark. There were some kids sitting on the curb under the streetlight at the end of the block. He began to walk in the opposite direction, up the winding road of Overlook Terrace to Fort Washington Avenue. He had always liked living in Washington Heights. It was close to the river and the George Washington Bridge, and he used to sit on the low banks near the water and watch the tugs and barges go by. Last year he had found another reason for liking Washington Heights. Miss Lattimore lived on Cabrini Boulevard, a few blocks from where Charlie was walking right at that moment.

He had gone by the Excelsior Apartments dozens of times, and once he had gone inside and read her name on the mailbox. *Lattimore-4B*. Later, as he stood in the road behind the building, he picked out her apartment from all the others. It was in the rear, facing the Hudson. Sometimes in the early evening he would see the lights up there and wonder what she was doing. He would make a bet with himself. "If she comes to the window and looks out, she feels the same way I do." . . . But she never came to the window and Charlie went home sorrowfully, moping around in his bedroom, angry at his mother's questioning.

His mother would say, "Do you feel all right, dear?"

"Sure," Charlie answered, "swell!" He would say it very sarcastically.

"Darling, if anything's the matter . . ."

"Aw for Pete's sake," he would exclaim. "For Pete's sake, mom!"

Then before he went to bed he would go to his mother, pat her under the chin with his finger and say, " 'Night sweetheart. Pleasant dreams." Because he was always sorry when he was rude to her. When you came right down to it, he had a swell family. His mother and dad always played square with him, and he used to think, "Why, I can tell them anything — *anything!*" But he couldn't tell them about this. This was different. He was in love — desperately in love — with an older woman, and he had been in love with her for one whole year.

Even the fellows at school didn't know. He made sure of that. Some of the boys used to say, "Hey, that Lattimore is some chick, huh? All teachers should have *her* looks." Charlie would smirk and tell them they were loony. He cut up in her class, shot paper airplanes across the room, dropped aspirin in inkwells,

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and whistled *La Cucaracha* when she read poetry. One day she kept him after class.

"Charlie," she said, "why can't we get along?"

He wanted to cry right then and there.

He said, "What difference does it make!"

"It makes a great deal of difference to me," she answered quietly, "You know, Charlie, I've read your compositions carefully. I think we both know you don't act the way you feel inside. You're quite a sensitive young man, Charlie. You write beautifully about beautiful things."

He thought, if she doesn't stop saying my name that way I *will* cry; if she doesn't stop saying things like that I *will* cry — I just won't be able to help myself.

He said gruffly, "I'll be late for Latin."

"Please think it over," Miss Jill Lattimore said.

The truth was, she understood him and no one else really did. "*You're quite a sensitive young man, Charlie. You write beautifully about beautiful things.*" And what else had she said? That he didn't act the way he felt inside. He should have said, "Yes, Miss Lattimore. 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.' " He should have said something adult and intellectual — like something Shakespeare had written. She was a bug on Shakespeare and Charlie was too now. He had thumbed through the pocket-book Shakespeare he kept under his pillow until the pages were worn and marked . . .

This term it will be different, Charlie thought as he strolled along Fort Washington Avenue, past the drug store where the gang crowded in booths, listening to the juke box and drinking cokes. He didn't want to go in the drug store and hear all that kid talk. He wanted to be by himself and think about how different it would be this term. He was grown up now and he would act grown up. Jill would notice it immediately because he wasn't going to clown around any more. The very first morning of class he would go to her and say, "You know, Miss Lattimore, I was something of a buffoon last year." Buffoon was a good word. And then he would quote, "My salad days, when I was green in judgement." That would do it. Short and to the point, with a peppering of Shakespeare and a sincere smile. He had been practicing sincere smiles all summer.

Charlie thought it was a lucky thing she taught both Junior and Senior English. He might never have seen her again, or heard her voice, or watched the proud way she walked with her head held high, the tilt to her nose giving her face a saucy look. He was a lot taller than she was, and really, when he thought about it, she seemed younger than he. It was a fact she didn't *look* 27 — she didn't look that old at all.

There was a moon up over the Hudson and dots of light on the Jersey side. Charlie walked slowly and he

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made his hands into fists. He had not seen her for three months. He remembered she had said that she would spend the summer in Colorado with her folks. School began in three days and she should be back. He turned and walked down Cabrini Boulevard. "*How like a Winter hath my absence been, From thee.*"

He stopped before the building where she lived, and when he looked up, he saw the lights there. She was back! There was a drum in his stomach and he could feel his knees weaken. He did a strange thing. He kept walking toward the rear of the building until he could touch the brick with his hand. He touched it very gently . . . When he saw the fire escape, he said in a whisper to himself, "Don't be crazy, Charlie. Hey, don't be crazy!"

It was easy because he wore sneakers on his feet and he went up the iron steps like a cat. He was afraid too. He had never done anything like this in his life and the moment had no reality for him. The moon was bright and big, and when he looked down he felt dizzy. He kept thinking "Go back" — but he wanted to see her.

He kept going until he came to the fourth level. At the windows of 4B he crouched, lifting his head slowly to stare into the room. She was not there. He saw the bookcases, the wide gray rug, the modern lamps and low tables, and the black vase of flowers. *Her* room. Her living room. He just kept looking at it, trying to imagine her there.

Then everything happened.

He remembered the sudden flash of light, the sound of a harsh voice ordering him to halt. He remembered running up the steps of the fire escape to the fifth floor and the sixth, his hands shaking, his legs like lead under him. He thought he would fall, he wished he could jump, and after he had gone three flights up, he stopped and held on to the wall of the building.

Two shots rang out in the night and he screamed, terrified. He stood clutching the brick, sobbing, saying "No!" aloud. A dark figure came stealthily toward him, grabbed the back of his sweater, jerked him forward. He felt the rough material of a policeman's coat. Again, he looked down and the scene made him dizzy. He felt himself buckle and the voice grew faint . . .

"He's a good boy, a *good* boy," his mother was crying. Charlie sat slumped in the wooden chair at the Police Station, hearing his mother defend him, his father question him. A fat Police Captain in shirtsleeves stood next to Charlie, his face kindly, his eye dark and serious.

"Try to explain, son," Charlie's father said, "What made you go up there? Try to explain before Miss Lattimore comes."

Charlie couldn't answer. He kept thinking that he was very nearly killed.

"Were there any other boys with you?" the Captain asked. "We got a report saying there was only one."

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"He's an Eagle Scout," his mother said to no one in particular. Her eyes were tired and red.

"Don't you like Miss Lattimore?" His father's tone was patient, soft. "Chuck, did you really go up there to look in *her* window?"

The officer interrupted, "That's where he was, all right — kneeling right outside her window."

Charlie knew he would cry out again any moment. There was a knot in his throat.

"I fired over his head," the officer said, "but it was dangerous just the same. He could have got it if he'd kept on running."

"What about it, Chuck?" his father said. "Try to tell us, son."

He had almost been shot down, Charlie thought, like a criminal. He was dreaming, he would wake up . . .

When he heard Miss Lattimore's voice, his hands went cold. His lips quivered and he could not have spoken if he had wanted to. He sat shaking.

"He's a good boy," his mother repeated, and he thought, "Aw mom, dear mom," and he kept his head lowered to keep them from seeing that his eyes were filled.

"I know he is," he heard Miss Lattimore say.

"We're sorry about this," his father apologized.

Charlie could not look up at her, and he could not stop his shoulders from heaving with the great sobs inside him. He was just a kid after all, he told himself, just a big sissy.

"I should have asked the janitor," Miss Lattimore began, "but I never thought he'd be hurt doing me that favor."

"You mean?" Charlie's mother cried out.

"My television wires. The nails were loose. It's attached to the window on the ledge outside and I didn't think he'd hurt himself. I certainly never thought he'd be reported for being a peeping Tom."

Then Charlie looked up. He stared at her. She looked little and delicate, standing there in the sky-blue linen dress with the sweater, the same color as her hair, over her shoulders.

"He was doing you a favor?" his mother asked hopefully.

"That's right," Miss Lattimore answered. "I met him on the Boulevard and asked him if he would. I just returned yesterday and there's so much work, getting resettled and —"

She's beautiful, he thought, she's like an angel.

"Well," the Captain boomed out, "that ends that!"

"Chuck, you should have said so." His father was smiling broadly, clasping his arm around Charlie's shoulder. "Good lord, son, you should have spoken up, told us about it."

Miss Lattimore was holding her glance steady with Charlie's. "He was probably afraid," she said carefully. "He could have been killed."

She had done this thing for him. She had understood, she had known, and she had done this thing for him . . .

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"Never run," the officer said at the door, "Only guilty people run, lad."

"Your post cards were forwarded to me, Charlie," Miss Lattimore said. "You seem to have had a nice summer." They were leaving the Police Station now — Miss Lattimore, Charlie, his mother and his father.

His mother said, "He went camping with some other boys alone in the woods. He's sixteen now, you know."

He didn't mind his mother saying that. For some reason he didn't mind.

His father said, "I have my car, Miss Lattimore. May I drop you?"

In the car everyone began to laugh about it. It wasn't really funny, his mother said, because he could have been killed. Charlie laughed too, sitting in the back seat looking at Jill's light blonde hair. When she waved goodbye to them in front of the Excelsior apartment house, Charlie watched her walk up the path until she was out of sight. Then he sat forward, resting his chin on the back of the seat where his parents sat, and he kept thinking about her . . . .

It was near midnight. He had waited for the house to be still, for the door to his parents room to close. Quickly and quietly he went down the hall, down the steps to the lobby, and out into the street. The late night air was colder now and he wished he had brought his topcoat, instead of wearing just his suit. His only suit — blue serge with a good press.

The streets were empty and the stores along Fort Washington Avenue were dark. When he came to Cabrini Boulevard, he did not turn down the back road. He walked directly to the entrance of the Excelsior. A man with a skinny dog on a leash held the door open for Charlie, and inside he took the elevator to the fourth floor.

When she answered the door, he said, "Hello, Jill."

She stood in a white terry-cloth robe, her long hair pulled behind her ears and held with a red ribbon. Her eyes were wide, her lips half parted, and she looked at him with disbelief.

"Aren't you going to ask me in?" he said.

She blocked the entrance. "Charlie Wright, go home. Now!"

"Jill," he said, "Listen, Jill —"

"Charlie, what on earth? Don't you realize that I was trying to be a good sport tonight? I was trying to help you, Charlie, don't you *realize* that?"

"Why?" he said. "Why were you helping me?" He made his lips grin playfully, but he was less sure now.

"You poor kid. Please, Charlie, go home! Don't you see — I was trying to help you because I knew you had a crush on me. All those post cards, and the ridiculous way you acted in my classes last year — and your compositions. Charlie, please! Don't make me do anything mean."

He didn't know what to do. He felt foolish standing before her in his best suit with his new shirt and striped tie, and the gold tie-clip his father had given him for his birthday. He said, "Crush?" and his voice did not sound like his own.

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"Charlie, leave right now. I mean it." Her eyes were round and as he looked at her intently, he suddenly became aware of something terrible. She was afraid of him. She was genuinely afraid of his presence there.

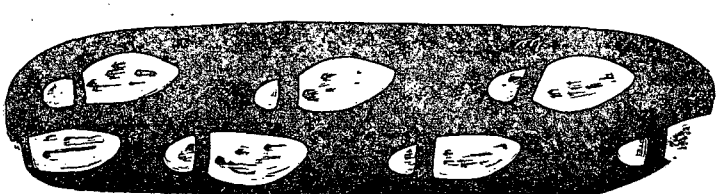
He said, "Look, I won't hurt you. I only want to — I want, I —" He began to stutter. He felt confused. He wanted to make it all right, to make whatever he was doing all right. She *wasn't* in love with him. He wanted to make that all right too, and it was. It was, because he didn't love her either any more. In those slow seconds he experienced a horrible awakening. All he wanted to do was go home, to get some sleep, to wake up and find the gang tomorrow. Play ball. Go up to the drug store. Things like that. He wasn't Charlie Wright standing before the door of his English teacher's apartment. That was crazy.

"Go on, now!" She raised her voice and the sound startled him. Now that he knew, he did not want anything more to happen to spoil it. He reached out without being conscious of what he was doing — only to stop the frantic words she was saying to him, to stop them and tell her he was sorry, that he was a fool, and was going.

He clamped his hand across her mouth. Instantly, she screamed. She screamed the way he had when they had shot at him on the fire escape.

He said, "Listen — I —" But it was too late. The man from the next apartment was running toward Charlie. Charlie stood still. Miss Jill Lattimore was crying, and the man had Charlie by the shoulder.

"Miss Lattimore," he tried to say again, but she was sobbing her words hysterically now. She was telling the man that Charlie was a foolish kid with a crush on her, that she couldn't control him, that this time he had gone too far . . . Charlie knew that in a matter of minutes the police would be on their way, the phone would ring out in the darkness of his parents' bedroom, and now he was on his own — really on his own.



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Agatha Christie's "The Six China Figures" is a very special story. It is the very first short story that Agatha Christie wrote about her bombastic Belgian bloodhound, Hercule Poirot. You will recall that Poirot made his debut in print in a novel, THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES. *This was in 1920, that glorious gumshoe year when so many other manhunters first appeared in book form — H. C. Bailey's Mr. Reggie Fortune, "Sapper's" (Cyril McNeile's) Bull-dog Drummond, Arthur Train's Mr. Tutt, Sax Rohmer's Moris Klaw, and William Le Queux's Raoul Becq. It took Agatha Christie three years — from 1920 to 1923 — to divert Poirot from full-length investigations to short-story inquiries. For the record, the first Poirot short story was published in the British periodical called "The Sketch," March 7, 1923, under the title, "The Affair at the Victory Ball."*

Other famous firsts in the short-story field? Well, of course, the first first of all was Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," introducing the world's first modern detective, C. Auguste Dupin. And the first Sherlock Holmes short story was A. Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia." The first Arsène Lupin short story? Probably Maurice Leblanc's "The Arrest of Arsène Lupin" (ironic title!) which appeared in the United States under the curious magazine title of "An Idyll on a Steam-Packet." The first Hildegarde Withers short story? Stuart Palmer's "The Riddle of the Dangling Pearl." The first Ellery Queen short story — "The Adventure of the One-Penny Black."

A fascinating 'tec topic . . . and we promise to dig deeper for you. In fact, you may consider this the inauguration of a new department — Famous Firsts — with some amazing discoveries due to come your way . . .

THE SIX CHINA FIGURES

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

PURE CHANCE LED MY FRIEND HERcule Poirot, formerly chief of the Belgian police force, to be connected with the Styles Case. His success brought him notoriety, and he decided to devote himself to the solving of problems in crime. Having been wounded on the Somme and invalided

Copyright, 1923, by McCall Corp.; appeared in "Bluebook," under the title "The Affair at the Victory Ball"

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out of the Army, I finally took up my quarters with him in London. Since I have a first-hand knowledge of most of his cases, it has been suggested to me that I select some of the most interesting and place them on record. In doing so, I feel that I cannot do better than begin with that strange tangle which aroused such widespread public interest at the time. I refer to the affair at the Victory Ball.

Although perhaps it is not so fully demonstrative of Poirot's peculiar methods as some of the more obscure cases, its sensational features, the well-known people involved, and the tremendous publicity given it by the press, make it stand out as a *cause célèbre*, and I have long felt that it is only fitting that Poirot's connection with the solution should be given to the world.

It was a fine morning in spring, and we were sitting in Poirot's rooms. My little friend, neat and dapper as ever, his egg-shaped head tilted slightly on one side, was delicately applying a new pomade to his mustache. A certain harmless vanity was a characteristic of Poirot's and fell into line with his general love of order and method. The Daily *Newsmonger*, which I had been reading, had slipped to the floor, and I was deep in thought when Poirot's voice recalled me.

"Of what are you thinking so deeply, *mon ami*?"

"To tell you the truth," I replied, "I was puzzling over this unaccountable affair at the Victory Ball. The papers are full of it."

I tapped the sheet with my finger as I spoke.

"Yes?"

"The more one reads of it, the more shrouded in mystery the whole thing becomes!" I warmed to my subject. "Who killed Lord Cronshaw? Was Coco Courtenay's death on the same night a mere coincidence? Was it an accident? Or did she deliberately take an overdose of cocaine?" I stopped, and then added dramatically: "These are the questions I ask myself."

Poirot, somewhat to my annoyance, did not play up. He was peering into the glass, and merely murmured: "Decidedly, this new pomade, it is a marvel for the mustaches!" Catching my eye, however, he added hastily: "Quite so — and how do you reply to your questions?"

But before I could answer, the door opened, and our landlady announced Inspector Japp.

The Scotland Yard man was an old friend and we greeted him warmly.

"Ah! my good Japp," cried Poirot, "and what brings you to see us?"

"Well, Monsieur Poirot," said Japp, seating himself and nodding to me, "I'm on a case that strikes me as being very much in your line, and I came along to know whether you'd care to have a finger in the pie?"

Poirot had a good opinion of Japp's abilities, though deploring his lamentable lack of method; but I, for my part, considered that the detective's highest talent lay in the gentle art of seeking favors — under the guise of conferring them!

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"It's this Victory Ball," said Japp persuasively. "Come, now, you'd like to have a hand in that."

Poirot smiled at me.

"My friend Hastings would, at all events. He was just holding forth on the subject, *n'est-ce pas, mon ami?*"

"Well, sir," said Japp condescendingly, "you shall be in it too. I can tell you, it's something of a feather in your cap to have inside knowledge of a case like this. Well, here's to business. You know the main facts of the case, I suppose, Monsieur Poirot?"

"From the papers only — and the imagination of the journalist is sometimes misleading. Recount the whole story to me."

Japp crossed his legs comfortably and began.

"As all the world and his wife now know, on Tuesday last a grand Victory Ball was held. Every twopenny-halfpenny hop calls itself that nowadays, but this was the real thing, held at the Colossus Hall, and all London at it — including young Lord Cronshaw and his party."

"His *dossier?*" interrupted Poirot. "I should say his bioscope — no, how do you call it — biograph'?"

"Viscount Cronshaw was the fifth viscount, twenty-five years of age, rich, unmarried, and very fond of the theatrical world. There were rumors of his being engaged to Miss Courtenay of the Albany Theater, who was known to her friends as 'Coco' and who was, by all accounts, a very fascinating young lady."

"Good. *Continuez.*"

"Lord Cronshaw's party consisted of six people, he himself, his uncle, the Honorable Eustace Beltane, a pretty American widow, Mrs. Mallaby, a young actor, Chris Davidson, his wife, and last but not least, Miss Coco Courtenay. It was a fancy-dress ball, as you know, and the Cronshaw party represented the old Italian Comedy — whatever that may be."

"The *Commedia dell' Arte*," murmured Poirot. "I know."

"Anyway, the costumes were copied from a set of china figures forming part of Eustace Beltane's collection. Lord Cronshaw was *Harlequin;* Beltane was *Punchinello;* Mrs. Mallaby matched him as *Pulcinella;* the Davidsons were *Pierrot* and *Pierrette;* and Miss Courtenay, of course, was *Columbine*. Now, quite early in the evening it was apparent that there was something wrong. Lord Cronshaw was moody and strange in his manner. When the party met together for supper in a small private room engaged by the host, everyone noticed that he and Miss Courtenay were no longer on speaking terms. She had obviously been crying, and seemed on the verge of hysterics. The meal was an uncomfortable one, and as they all left the supper-room, she turned to Chris Davidson and requested him audibly to take her home, as she was 'sick of the ball.' The young actor hesitated, glancing at Lord Cronshaw, and finally drew them both back to the supper-room.

"But all his efforts to secure a reconciliation were unavailing, and he

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accordingly got a taxi and escorted the now weeping Miss Courtenay back to her flat. Although obviously very much upset, she did not confide in him, merely reiterating again and again that she would 'make old Cronch sorry for this!' That is the only hint we have that her death might not have been accidental, and it's precious little to go on. By the time Davidson had quieted her down somewhat, it was too late to return to the Colossus Hall, and Davidson accordingly went straight home to his flat in Chelsea, where his wife arrived shortly afterward, bearing the news of the terrible tragedy that had occurred after his departure.

"Lord Cronshaw, it seems, became more and more moody as the ball went on. He kept away from his party, and they hardly saw him during the rest of the evening. It was about 1:30 A.M., just before the grand cotillion when everyone was to unmask, that Captain Digby, a brother officer who knew his disguise, noticed him standing in a box gazing down on the scene.

" 'Hullo, Cronch!' he called. 'Come down and be sociable! What are you moping about up there for like a boiled owl? Come along now!'

" 'Right!' responded Cronshaw. 'Wait for me, or I'll never find you in the crowd.'

"He turned and left the box as he spoke. Captain Digby, who had Mrs. Davidson with him, waited. The minutes passed, but Lord Cronshaw did not appear. Finally Digby grew impatient.

" 'Does the fellow think we're going to wait all night for him?' he exclaimed.

"At that moment Mrs. Mallaby joined them, and they explained the situation.

" 'Say, now,' cried the pretty widow vivaciously, 'he's like a bear with a sore head tonight. Let's go and rout him out.'

"The search commenced, but met with no success until it occurred to Mrs. Mallaby that he might possibly be found in the room where they had supped an hour earlier. They made their way there. What a sight met their eyes! There was *Harlequin*, sure enough, but stretched on the floor with a table knife in his heart!"

Japp stopped, and Poirot nodded, and said with the relish of the specialist:

"*Une belle affaire!* And there was no clue to the perpetrator of the deed? But how should there be!"

"Well," continued the Inspector, "you know the rest. The tragedy was a double one. Next day there were headlines in all the papers, and a brief statement to the effect that Miss Courtenay, the popular actress, had been discovered dead in her bed, and that her death was due to an overdose of cocaine. Now, was it accident or suicide? Her maid who was called upon to give evidence, admitted that Miss Courtenay was a confirmed taker of the drug, and a verdict of accidental death was returned. Nevertheless we can't leave the possibility of suicide out of account. Her death

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is particularly unfortunate, since it leaves us no clue now to the cause of the quarrel the preceding night. By the way, a small enamel box was found on the dead man. It had *Coco* written across it in diamonds, and was half full of cocaine. It was identified by Miss Courtenay's maid as belonging to her mistress, who nearly always carried it about with her, since it contained her supply of the drug to which she was fast becoming a slave."

"Was Lord Cronshaw himself addicted to the drug?"

"Very far from it. He held unusually strong views on the subject of dope."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

"But since the box was in his possession, he knew that Miss Courtenay took it. Suggestive, that, is it not, my good Japp?"

"Ah!" said Japp rather vaguely.

I smiled.

"Well," said Japp, "that's the case. What do you think of it?"

"You found no clue of any kind that has not been reported?"

"Yes, there was this." Japp took a small object from his pocket and handed it over to Poirot. It was a small pompon of emerald-green silk, with some ragged threads hanging from it, as though it had been wrenched violently away.

"We found it in the dead man's hand, which was tightly clenched over it," explained the Inspector.

Poirot handed it back without any comment and asked:

"Had Lord Cronshaw enemies?"

"None that anyone knows of. He seemed a popular young fellow."

"Who benefits by his death?"

"His uncle, the Honorable Eustace Beltane, comes into the title and estates. There are one or two suspicious facts against him. Several people declare that they heard a violent altercation going on in the little supper-room, and that Eustace Beltane was one of the disputants. You see, the table knife being snatched up off the table would fit in with the murder being done in the heat of a quarrel."

"What does Mr. Beltane say?"

"Declares one of the waiters was the worse for liquor, and that he was giving him a dressing down. Also that it was nearer to 1 than half-past. You see, Captain Digby's evidence fixes the time pretty accurately. Only about ten minutes elapsed between his speaking to Cronshaw and the finding of the body."

"And in any case I suppose Mr. Beltane, as *Punchinello*, was wearing a hump and a ruffle?"

"I don't know the exact details of the costumes," said Japp, looking curiously at Poirot. "And anyway, I don't quite see what that has got to do with it."

"No?" There was a hint of mockery in Poirot's smile. He continued quietly, his eyes shining with the green light I had learned to recognize so well: "There was a curtain in this little supper-room, was there not?"

"Yes, but —"

"With a space behind it sufficient to conceal a man?"

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"Yes — in fact, there's a small recess, but how you knew about it — you haven't been to the place, have you, Monsieur Poirot?"

"No, my good Japp, I supplied the curtain from my brain. Without it, the drama is not reasonable. And always one must be reasonable. But tell me, did they not send for a doctor?"

"At once, of course. But there was nothing to be done. Death must have been instantaneous."

Poirot nodded rather impatiently.

"Yes, yes, I understand. This doctor gave evidence at the inquest?"

"Yes."

"Did he say nothing of any unusual symptom — was there nothing about the appearance of the body which struck him as being abnormal?"

Japp stared hard at the little man.

"Yes, Monsieur Poirot. I don't know what you're getting at, but he did mention that there was a tension and stiffness about the limbs which he was quite at a loss to account for."

"Aha!" said Poirot. "Aha! *Mon Dieu!* Japp, that gives one to think, does it not?"

I saw that it had certainly not given Japp to think.

"If you're thinking of poison, Monsieur, who on earth would poison a man first and then stick a knife into him?"

"In truth that would be ridiculous," agreed Poirot placidly.

"Now is there anything you want to see, Monsieur? If you'd like to examine the room where the body was found —"

Poirot waved his hand.

"Not in the least. You have told me the only thing that interests me — Lord Cronshaw's views on the subject of drug-taking."

"Then there's nothing you want to see?"

"Just one thing."

"What is that?"

"The set of china figures from which the costumes were copied."

Japp stared.

"Well, you're a funny one!"

"You can manage that for me?"

"Come round to Berkeley Square now if you like. Mr. Beltane — or His Lordship, as I should say now — won't object."

We set off at once in a taxi. The new Lord Cronshaw was not at home, but at Japp's request we were shown into the "China room," where the gems of the collection were kept. Japp looked round him rather helplessly.

"I don't see how you'll ever find the ones you want, Monsieur."

But Poirot had already drawn a chair in front of the mantelpiece and was hopping up upon it like a nimble robin. Above the mirror, on a small shelf all to themselves, stood six china figures. Poirot examined them minutely, making a few comments to us as he did so.

"*Les voilà!* The old Italian Comedy. Three pairs! *Harlequin* and *Columbine*, *Pierrot* and *Pierrette* — very dainty in white and green — and *Punchinello* and *Pulcinella* in mauve and yellow. Very elaborate, the costume of *Punchi-*

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nello — ruffles and frills, a hump, a high hat. Yes, as I thought, very elaborate."

He replaced the figures carefully, and jumped down.

Japp looked unsatisfied, but as Poirot had clearly no intention of explaining anything, the detective put the best face he could upon the matter. As we were preparing to leave, the master of the house came in, and Japp performed the necessary introductions.

The sixth Viscount Cronshaw was a man of about 50, suave in manner, with a handsome, dissolute face. Evidently an elderly roué, with the languid manner of a poseur. I took an instant dislike to him. He greeted us graciously enough, declaring he had heard great accounts of Poirot's skill, and placing himself at our disposal in every way.

"The police are doing all they can, I know," he said. "But I much fear the mystery of my nephew's death will never be cleared up. The whole thing seems utterly mysterious."

Poirot was watching him keenly. "Your nephew had no enemies that you know of?"

"None whatever. I am sure of that." He paused, and then went on: "If there are any questions you would like to ask —"

"Only one." Poirot's voice was serious. "The costumes — they were reproduced *exactly*, from your figurines?"

"To the smallest detail."

"Thank you, milor'. That is all I wanted to be sure of. I wish you good day."

"And what next?" inquired Japp as we hurried down the street. "I've got to report at the Yard, you know."

"*Bien!* I will not detain you. I have one other little matter to attend to, and then —"

"Yes?"

"The case will be complete."

"What? You don't mean it! You know who killed Lord Cronshaw?"

"*Parfaitement.*"

"Who was it? Eustace Beltane?"

"Ah! *mon ami*, you know my little weakness! Always I have a desire to keep the threads in my own hands up to the last minute. But have no fear. I will reveal all when the time comes. I want no credit — the affair shall be yours, on the condition that you permit me to play out the *dénouement* my own way."

"That's fair enough," said Japp. "That is, if the *dénouement* ever comes! But I say, you *are* an oyster, aren't you?" Poirot smiled. "Well, so long. I'm off to the Yard."

He strode off down the street, and Poirot hailed a passing taxi.

"Where are we going now?" I asked in lively curiosity.

"To Chelsea to see the Davidsons."

He gave the address to the driver.

"What do you think of the new Lord Cronshaw?" I asked.

"What says my good friend Hastings?"

"I distrust him instinctively."

"You think he is the 'wicked uncle' of the story books, eh?"

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"Don't you?"

"Me, I think he was most amiable toward us," said Poirot noncommittally.

"Because he had his reasons!"

Poirot looked at me, shook his head sadly, and murmured something that sounded like: "No method."

The Davidsons lived on the third floor of a block of "mansion" flats. Mr. Davidson was out, we were told, but Mrs. Davidson was at home. We were ushered into a long, low room with garish Oriental hangings. The air felt close and oppressive, and there was an overpowering fragrance of joss sticks. Mrs. Davidson came to us almost immediately, a small, fair creature whose fragility would have seemed pathetic and appealing had it not been for the rather shrewd and calculating gleam in her light blue eyes.

Poirot explained our connection with the case, and she shook her head sadly.

"Poor Cronch — and poor Coco too! We were both so fond of her, and her death has been a terrible grief to us. What is it you want to ask me? Must I really go over all that dreadful evening again?"

"Oh, madame, believe me I would not harass your feelings unnecessarily. Indeed, Inspector Japp has told me all that is needful. I only wish to see the costume you wore at the ball that night."

The lady looked somewhat surprised, and Poirot continued smoothly:

"You comprehend, madame, that I work on the system of my country. There we always 'reconstruct' the crime. It is possible that I may have an actual *représentation*, and if so, you understand, the costumes would be important."

Mrs. Davidson still looked a bit doubtful.

"I've heard of reconstructing a crime, of course," she said. "But I didn't know you were so particular about details. But I'll fetch the dress now."

She left the room and returned almost immediately with a dainty wisp of white satin and green. Poirot took it from her and examined it, handing it back with a bow.

"*Merci, madame!* I see you have had the misfortune to lose one of your green pompons, the one on the shoulder here."

"Yes, it got torn off at the ball. I picked it up and gave it to poor Lord Cronshaw to keep for me."

"That was after supper?"

"Yes."

"Not long before the tragedy, perhaps?"

A faint look of alarm came into Mrs. Davidson's pale eyes, and she replied quickly:

"Oh, no — long before that. Quite soon after supper, in fact."

"I see. Well, that is all. I will not derange you further. *Bonjour, madame.*"

"Well," I said, as we emerged from the building. "That explains the mystery of the green pompon."

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"I wonder."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"You saw me examine the dress, Hastings?"

"Yes?"

"*Eh bien*, the pompon that was missing had not been wrenched off, as the lady said. On the contrary, it had been *cut* off, my friend, cut off with scissors. The threads were all quite even."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed. "This becomes more and more involved."

"On the contrary," replied Poirot placidly, "it becomes more and more simple."

"Poirot," I cried, "one day I shall murder you! Your habit of finding everything perfectly simple is aggravating to the last degree!"

"But when I explain, *mon ami*, is it not always perfectly simple?"

"Yes; that is the annoying part of it! I feel then that I could have done it myself."

"And so you could, Hastings, so you could. If you would but take the trouble of arranging your ideas! Without method —"

"Yes, yes," I said hastily, for I knew only too well Poirot's eloquence when started on his favorite theme. "Tell me, what do we do next? Are you really going to reconstruct the crime?"

"Hardly that. Shall we say that the drama is over, but that I propose to add a — Harlequinade?"

The following Tuesday was fixed upon by Poirot as the day for his mysterious performance. The preparations greatly intrigued me. A white screen was erected at one side of the room, flanked by heavy curtains at either side. A man with some lighting apparatus arrived next, and finally a group of members of the theatrical profession, who disappeared into Poirot's bedroom, which had been rigged up as a temporary dressing-room.

Shortly before 8, Japp arrived, in no very cheerful mood. I gathered that the official detective hardly approved of Poirot's plan.

"Bit melodramatic, like all his ideas. But there, it can do no harm, and as he says, it might save us a good bit of trouble. He's been very smart over the case. I was on the same scent myself, of course," — I felt instinctively that Japp was straining the truth here — "but there, I promised to let him play the thing out his own way. Ah! here is the crowd."

His Lordship arrived first, escorting Mrs. Mallaby, whom I had not as yet seen. She was a pretty, dark-haired woman, and appeared perceptibly nervous. The Davidsons followed. Chris Davidson also I saw for the first time. He was handsome enough in a rather obvious style, tall and dark, with the easy grace of the actor.

Poirot had arranged seats for the party facing the screen. This was illuminated by a bright light. Poirot switched out the other lights so that the room was in darkness except for the screen. Poirot's voice rose out of the gloom.

"Messieurs, mesdames, a word of

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explanation. Six figures in turn will pass across the screen. They are familiar to you. *Pierrot* and his *Pierrette; Punchinello* the buffoon and elegant *Pulcinella;* beautiful *Columbine*, lightly dancing, *Harlequin*, the sprite, invisible to man!"

With these words of introduction, the show began. In turn each figure that Poirot had mentioned bounded before the screen, stayed there a moment poised, and then vanished. The lights went up, and a sigh of relief went round. Everyone had been nervous, fearing they knew not what. It seemed to me that the proceedings had gone singularly flat. If the criminal was among us, and Poirot expected him to break down at the mere sight of a familiar figure, the device had failed signally — as it was almost bound to do. Poirot, however, appeared not a whit discomposed. He stepped forward, beaming.

"Now, messieurs and mesdames, will you be so good as to tell me, one at a time what it is that we have just seen? Will you begin, milor'?"

The gentleman looked rather puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

"Just tell me what we have been seeing."

"I — er — well, I should say we have seen six figures passing in front of a screen and dressed to represent the personages in the old Italian Comedy, or — er — ourselves the other night."

"Never mind the other night, milor'," broke in Poirot. "The first part of your speech was what I wanted. Madame, you agree with Milor' Cronshaw?"

He had turned as he spoke to Mrs. Mallaby.

"I — er — yes, of course."

"You agree that you have seen six figures representing the Italian Comedy?"

"Why, certainly."

"Monsieur Davidson? You too?"

"Yes."

"Madame?"

"Yes."

"Hastings? Japp? Yes? You are all in accord?"

He looked around upon us; his face grew rather pale, and his eyes were green as any cat's.

"And yet — *you are all wrong!* Your eyes have lied to you — as they lied to you on the night of the Victory Ball. To 'see things with your own eyes,' as they say, is not always to see the truth. One must see with the eyes of the mind; one must employ the little cells of gray! Know, then, that tonight and on the night of the Victory Ball, you saw, not *six* figures but *five!* See!"

The lights went out again. A figure bounded in front of the screen — *Pierrot!*

"Who is that?" demanded Poirot. "Is it *Pierrot?*"

"Yes," we all cried.

"Look again!"

With a swift movement the man divested himself of his loose *Pierrot* garb. There in the limelight stood glittering *Harlequin!* At the same mo-

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ment there was a cry and an overturned chair.

"Curse you," snarled Davidson's voice. "Curse you! How did you guess?"

Then came the clink of handcuffs and Japp's calm official voice. "I arrest you, Christopher Davidson — charge of murdering Viscount Cronshaw — anything you say used in evidence against you."

It was a quarter of an hour later. A *recherché* little supper had appeared; and Poirot, beaming all over his face, was dispensing hospitality and answering our eager questions.

"It was all very simple. The circumstances in which the green pompon was found suggested at once that it had been torn from the costume of the murderer. I dismissed *Pierrette* from my mind (since it takes considerable strength to drive a table knife home) and fixed upon *Pierrot* as the criminal. But *Pierrot* left the ball nearly two hours before the murder was committed. So he must either have returned to the ball later to kill Lord Cronshaw, or — *he must have killed him before he left!* Was that impossible? Who had seen Lord Cronshaw after supper that evening? Only Mrs. Davidson, whose statement, I suspected, was a deliberate fabrication uttered with the object of accounting for the missing pompon, which, of course, she cut from her own dress to replace the one missing on her husband's costume. But then, *Harlequin*, who was seen in the box at 1:30, must have been an impersonation. For a moment, earlier, I had considered the possibility of Mr. Beltane being the guilty party. But with his elaborate costume, it was clearly impossible that he could have doubled in the rôles of *Punchinello* and *Harlequin*. On the other hand, to Davidson, a young man of about the same height as the murdered man and an actor by profession, the thing was simplicity itself.

"But one thing worried me. Surely a doctor could not fail to perceive the difference between a man who had been dead two hours and one who had been dead ten minutes! *Eh bien!* the doctor *did* perceive it! But he was not taken to the body and asked 'How long has this man been dead?' On the contrary, he was informed that the man had been seen alive ten minutes ago, and so he merely commented at the inquest on the abnormal stiffening of the limbs for which he was quite unable to account!

"All was now marching famously for my theory. Davidson had killed Lord Cronshaw immediately after supper, when, as you remember, he was seen to draw him back into the supper-room. Then he departed with Miss Courtenay, left her at the door of her flat (instead of going in and trying to pacify her as he affirmed), and returned posthaste to the Colossus — but as *Harlequin*, not *Pierrot* — a simple transformation effected by removing his outer costume."

The uncle of the dead man leaned forward, his eyes perplexed.

"But if so, he must have come to

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the ball prepared to kill his victim. What earthly motive could he have had? The motive, that's what I can't get."

"Ah! There we come to the second tragedy — that of Miss Courtenay. There was one simple point which everyone overlooked. Miss Courtenay died of cocaine poisoning — but her supply of the drug was in the enamel box which was found on Lord Cronshaw's body. Where, then, did she obtain the dose which killed her? Only one person could have supplied her with it — the person last with her, Davidson. And that explains everything. It accounts for her friendship with the Davidsons and her demand that Davidson should escort her home. Lord Cronshaw, who was almost fanatically opposed to drug-taking, discovered that she was addicted to cocaine, and suspected that Davidson supplied her with it. Davidson doubtless denied this, but Lord Cronshaw determined to get the truth from Miss Courtenay at the ball. He could forgive the wretched girl, but he would certainly have no mercy on the man who made a living by trafficking in drugs. Exposure and ruin confronted Davidson. He went to the ball determined that Cronshaw's silence must be obtained at any cost."

"Was Coco's death an accident?"

"I suspect that it was an accident cleverly engineered by Davidson. She was furiously angry with Cronshaw, first for his reproaches, and secondly for taking her cocaine from her. Davidson supplied her with more, and probably suggested her augmenting the dose as a defiance to 'old Cronch'!"

"One other thing," I said. "The recess and the curtain? How did you know about them?"

"Why, *mon ami*, that was the most simple of all. Waiters had been in and out of that little room, so, obviously, the body could not have been lying where it was found on the floor. There must be some place in the room where it could be hidden. I deduced a curtain and a recess behind it. Davidson dragged the body there, and later, after drawing attention to himself in the box, he dragged it out again before finally leaving the Hall. It was one of his best moves. He is a clever fellow!"

But in Poirot's green eyes I read unmistakably the unspoken remark:

"But not quite so clever as Hercule Poirot!"

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

An off-the-trail, change-of-pace story about an Afridi sniper, one Feroz Khan, who (if he said so himself) was the greatest marksman in the world . . . The author is a Canadian newspaperman who lived in India for several years — hence the locale and authentic flavor of his prize-winning tale. At the time Mr. MacClure sent us "The Stone on Abdul's Head," he had just sold an on-the-spot Indian piece to "True" — an article on the Todas of the Nilgiris Hills, whom the author considers "The Happiest Males on Earth." So you see, Mr. MacClure obviously knows his stuff. His hobbies? Easy to guess: traveling when he can, and shooting and fishing anywhere in the world.

THE STONE ON ABDUL'S HEAD

by D. MacCLURE

NO NEED TO HURRY, SAHIB. THE gazelle is dead. When we have reached the body you will find that my bullet has entered its skull at a point two fingers below the left ear.

How am I so certain? Because I am Feroz Khan, the greatest marksman in the world — Feroz Khan on whom Allah has bestowed eyes keener than a hawk's, hands steadier than the hills, and a judgment of the tricks of wind and light such as no other man possesses. Is it not said of me in the Furious Gomal that when my bullets miss, stones will fall upwards to the sky? And have I not just given proof of my skill by dropping a running gazelle at four hundred yards in a poor light? Not that I call that a difficult shot!

The Sahib asks me what I *would* call a difficult shot? To drop a hawk on the wing with a single bullet or to knock the tail off a darting lizard is not easy, even for an Afridi sniper. Has the Sahib ever tried to shoot a moth at twenty yards, or to drill a particular blade of corn in the centre of a field when the wind is blowing from the east?

One day I will do those tricks for the Sahib's pleasure. Not this day because I have a sore eye and my hands are shaking by reason of the fever I had last night, and were I to fail the Sahib would laugh at me and say I was merely a boaster. Some day when I am feeling well I will do them, and the Sahib will see for himself that I am no liar.

The best shot I have ever made? It puzzles me to answer that question.

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When all are perfect how can one make a choice?

Thinking back, I remember one occasion, Sahib. I will tell you about it while we make a detour to the gazelle's body.

Usually a shot is fired to slay an enemy, is it not? But in the case of the shot of which I am thinking that was not so. I had to fire to *save* life and not to kill. My skill was the test of the innocence of a man wrongfully accused.

He was my friend, my "bhai-band" — blood-brother. Abdul Hakim was his name. We were of the same age and we lived in the same village. I speak of some years back when my skill with a rifle was not as great as it is now.

Even then I wasted fewer bullets than any other Afridi sniper in the Gomal, and as the Sahib is aware, bullets to us are more precious than rubies. I had a Government rifle, a Springfield of the latest pattern, which I had chanced to find lying on the "maidan" — the plain — where an American regiment had camped. Yes, Sahib, "found" was the word I said. . . . I picked it up from the sand where some tired soldier had dropped it, and I kept it for myself.

Second only to Abdul Hakim, my blood-brother, I loved that rifle. Day and night it never left my hand. If I put it down for a moment I felt as if I were naked. It became, as it were, part of my own body. To lift it to my shoulder and take aim was as easy as crooking my finger.

I passed hours in polishing it and cleaning it and handling it. I had found a large quantity of ammunition at the same spot I had found the rifle, and I used it without stint for practice — always at targets that other men vowed were impossible to hit. When I missed, I tried again and again until the bullet found its mark. That is the way to learn to shoot.

Then it chanced there was a theft in the village. An old woman was robbed. A pot of money was taken from her hut while she slept, and she made complaint to Nir Din, who was then the chief. In our Afridi villages theft is a graver matter than it is under the law of the Pakistan Government. It is held to be a worse offense than killing, and the penalty is death by strangulation.

Nir Din was a wise and just man. He sent every man, woman, and child outside the village, only himself and a few of the leading men remaining. They made a search. Suspicion had already fallen on my blood-brother, and his was one of the first huts they visited. The earth beneath his bed had been disturbed recently, so they dug there and found the pot with a little of the money still remaining.

Black evidence against Abdul Hakim, was it not, Sahib? Too black, for had he really been the thief he would never have left the money where it could so easily be found. Besides, I knew for a certainty that he was innocent. On the night, and at the time the money had been taken, he had been with me in the hills shooting

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leopard. But I was the only man who could prove he had been there.

To me, and to Abdul Hakim himself, the matter was clear. He had an enemy, a lying dog called Shere Makmud. There had been a quarrel about a woman. Both Shere Makmud and my blood-brother had desired her. She had favored Abdul Hakim, and this trick was Shere Makmud's revenge.

He was the son of evil, that Shere Makmud! Pock-marked and as ugly as a camel, a coward in a fight and a disgrace to the Afridi clan. Yet he had great cunning and a tongue that could babble like a stream when the snows are melting. Even I, who knew that he was speaking lies, could hardly disbelieve him when he swore he had seen Abdul Hakim stealing away from the old woman's hut that night.

He brought witnesses too. His relations and other base ones whom he had bribed to support his perjury. One claimed he had seen Abdul enter the hut, another that he had watched Abdul dig the hole and hide the money, another that he had heard Abdul boasting of the theft.

Thus did they swear in the "durbar" before Nir Din and the elders. They vomited their lies like poisoned jackals. As I listened, I thought I could see the death cord being twisted around the throat of my blood-brother.

Nir Din looked as if he believed their words. But just before he passed sentence he called for anyone who could testify to Abdul's innocence. And I was the only one who came forward, for I was the only one who knew for a certainty where Abdul had been that night.

It was my word against that of a dozen. And I had no golden tongue such as Shere Makmud possessed. It was bullets I was fluent with, not words. I gave my evidence, lying on the ground at Nir Din's feet and sobbing as I spoke. I was but a boy, and my heart was bleeding at the thought of the injustice.

But Nir Din mocked me. He thought I was lying to save my blood-brother, and did not question me with easy words as he had done Shere Makmud and his friends. Instead, he spoke insultingly of my shooting. He asked me if I had ever hit certain targets at certain distances, and I answered truthfully that I had, he laughed aloud and called me a boaster and a liar.

He looked at Shere Makmud and his friends, and they also laughed, seeking to curry favor with the chief. They were like jackals fawning round a lion. Then Nir Din turned to me and said:

"The feats you claim to have performed with your rifle are impossible — therefore you are condemned out of your own mouth as a liar. How then are we to believe what you tell us concerning Abdul Hakim? If your tongue lies about such a little matter as your skill at shooting, how much more must it lie when the life of your blood-brother is at stake!"

The words angered me. I answered

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hotly that I spoke the truth about both my skill and Abdul's innocence.

Nir Din bent and lifted a pebble from the ground. It was round and white, and not quite as large as a hen's egg. He held it up so that all could see it, and he asked if any man would undertake to hit that stone with a single bullet, firing at a range of four hundred yards.

There was laughter at the question. At four hundred yards the stone would appear but a tiny white speck even to a man with the eyesight of a hawk. If he hit with a single bullet it could only be by accident.

Nir Din turned to me and spoke tauntingly:

"What has Feroz Khan, who claims to be the greatest shot in the Gomal, to say about this matter?" he asked. "Surely Feroz Khan with his magic skill and his magic rifle can hit this great rock at such a short distance!"

Sahib, I was young and foolish and my blood was on fire by reason of the way they had mocked me. Although in my secret heart I felt no certainty about the matter, I answered boldly that I could hit the stone with ease.

My words were greeted by the laughter they deserved. Those were Afridis who had heard me, fighting men who had carried firearms since they could walk. They knew that my claim was but an empty boast. And they shouted to the chief that he should put me to the test.

Nir Din raised his hand to command silence. He answered in a loud voice so that all could hear:

"Against the evidence of a dozen men Feroz Khan has sworn that Abdul Hakim is innocent of the theft. Also, he has claimed that he can do the impossible with his rifle, and it is in my heart, therefore, to expose him as the liar he most assuredly is.

"I will give him a chance to fulfill his boast. Tomorrow Abdul Hakin will be tied to a post so that he cannot move, and this stone will be placed upon his head. If Feroz Khan can knock the stone off with a single bullet, without grazing the skin, I will take it as a sign from Allah that his blood-brother was innocent of the theft. If he misses the stone by aiming high or wide, Abdul Hakim will die with the strangling cord round his neck according to the custom; and if the bullet flies low and kills Abdul Hakim we will know that he was guilty and that Allah himself has dealt justice . . . Feroz Khan, you have heard my words. Do you agree to make the test?"

Sahib, what could I do except agree? Had I refused, my blood-brother would have lost even that poor chance of his life being saved.

So I agreed. Outwardly my face was bold, but there was no confidence in my heart. It was such a little stone, and how could I, under such a load of anxiety, shoot my best? A man must have an easy mind if he would shoot straight.

I passed the night cleaning my rifle and offering prayers to Allah that he would defend the innocent. When the sun was fully risen they took me

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to the place where the test was to be made. Abdul Hakim had been bound to a post so that he could not move a finger, and Nir Din himself placed the white stone upon his head.

At four hundred yards distance I lay down and sighted my rifle at the stone. Behind me stood Nir Din and the elders of the village, and with them was Shere Makmud and the other men who had given witness. And these false ones grinned and whispered to each other as they watched.

I had planned to fire quickly, but my heart was beating so fast that my hands shook. The pebble danced about the foresight like a tiny white midge. Perspiration ran down my forehead and blinded my eyes. At last I lowered the rifle in despair without having touched the trigger.

Sahib, you should have heard how Shere Makmud and the dogs that were his friends yelped their glee! They thought I was afraid to fire, and by Allah they were right, but that wasn't for *them* to know!

It was as if a devil came into my heart when I heard their laughter. I turned to Nir Din and asked him if he would grant me a favor.

He asked me what I wished, and I answered, "Nir Din, it is in my heart to shame these fools. In their ignorance they think it is impossible to hit the stone at this range. Shall we move back another hundred yards so that I can show them the marksmanship of Feroz Khan?"

And Nir Din answered, "It is your choice. Since you think the test is too easy we will increase the range."

So we moved back another hundred yards to the foot of a hill that stood beside the plain. And again I lay down and took my aim.

Now I could no longer see the pebble save as the faintest blur of white upon the darkness of Abdul Hakim's hair.

It came into my mind to aim low, thus saving my blood-brother from death by strangulation. But the beating of my heart made my rifle waver like a branch in the wind. And I was lying on soft sand that gave no firm rest for my elbow.

At last I lowered the rifle a second time, and Shere Makmud and his friends yelled like jackals chasing a fox, asking me why I did not fire, and if I thought the range was still too short.

Sahib, it was as if the blood within me turned to fire when I heard their taunts. Turning to the chief I asked if I might go up to the top of the hill and prove my marksmanship by hitting the stone from there?

Laughing, he gave permission. It was a small hill, but the sides were steep. I climbed up alone.

It was my last chance, Sahib. I swear that neither before nor since has a man aimed a rifle with greater care.

I made my body, as it were, part of the rock on which I lay. I cleaved to it with my chest, my knees, the inside of my thighs and feet. I thought of the sun and the wind and the distor-

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tion of the glare beating up from the sand. While I made the calculations I prayed to Allah, and my forefinger tightened on the trigger as slowly as the tendril of a plant curling round a twig.

I held my breath. I think even my heart stopped beating. And then — gently, lingeringly, as if I were kissing the lips of a "houri" — I dispatched the bullet. But before it had left the barrel I knew that it would never hit the pebble.

I had aimed short and a little to the left. Very short, if the truth be told. Instead of winging its way above the plain to where Abdul stood, my bullet struck the sand close to the foot of the hill. . . . Ay, but before it struck that sand it had passed through Shere Makmud's head.

Before Shere Makmud's body had touched the ground his brother somersaulted into the air with my second bullet through his spine. I was firing faster than a man could wink. My third bullet brought down Shere Makmud's father, and my fourth and fifth sent yet two more of the lying dogs to howl at the gates of Paradise.

Ho, ho, Sahib! If only you had been present to see! There was no cover where they could hide. Had I wished, I could have killed them all with ease. When I shouted to them and asked if they were satisfied with the progress of the test, they answered on their knees with their hands raised in the air.

With one voice they cried that Abdul Hakim was innocent, and they besought me not to fire again lest once more I should miss the pebble!

Sahib, behold the body of the gazelle. Shot through the neck instead of where I said. Blame the fever, Sahib — the fever that made my hand shake.

NEXT MONTH . . .

An unusual issue — 14 complete stories, including:

Philip MacDonald's DREAM NO MORE
Anthony Boucher's MURDER WAS THEIR BUSINESS
Lord Dunsany's NEAR THE BACK OF BEYOND
Frank Gruber's YOU CAN'T CRACK A MODERN SAFE
Vincent Starrett's CRAZY LIKE A FOX

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THE SECOND CHILDREN'S HOUR

In our July 1954 issue we brought you a group of four stories by children — "first stories" by a twelve-year-old boy from Brooklyn, a twelve-year-old American boy living in Ireland, an eight-year-old American girl living in Germany, and a six-year-old child prodigy from New York. These four tales were remarkable efforts to have come from such young writers, and the stories themselves almost ran the gamut of the mystery field — a study of juvenile delinquency, a hardboiled satire, a "pure" detective story, and a new-fashioned ghost story. We wondered if our publication of stories by children would quicken the interest of other children to try so difficult a "game" as creative writing. We hoped it would, and we are glad to report that our hopes were fulfilled.

We are now ready to give you The Second Children's Hour — this time two stories, one by a fifteen-year-old girl and the other by a nine-year-old boy . . . what talent there is in the younger generation!

First, then, meet Rebecca Weiner, a Junior (at the time she wrote her story) at Hillhouse High School in New Haven, Connecticut. In her letter accompanying the story, Miss Weiner said: "I have always been a little shy of showing my stories even to my family; now I am taking a step that is just about killing me — sending you a story." Have you ever read a more touching, more sensitive, more penetratingly true statement made by a young — a very young — author?

Miss Weiner told us that her family ties are exceptionally close, and that she has always received warmth and encouragement from her parents. In her senior year in high school she was editor-in-chief of the school literary magazine, "The Gleam." Writing, she insists, is not an avocation with her; "rather [and we now quote] it is a part of me and something I must do. I wrote my first story when I was six, and since then I have not stopped writing, nor have I changed my mind as to my life-long ambition — to write a really great book some day."

Miss Weiner's favorite authors include Thornton Wilder, J. D. Salinger, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and John Steinbeck; and one of her ambitions is to study creative writing under Archibald MacLeish. Oh, this wonderful, fabulous, awe-inspiring younger generation!

And now, Rebecca Weiner's story . . .

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"WELL?"

by REBECCA WEINER

MISS RILEY WAS VERY AFRAID FOR the first time. The sensation was new to her; she thought back and back and remembered nothing like this. She did a great deal of thinking now, sitting in her lonely, darkened apartment over a cup of coffee and idly scratching on the chrome table-top with a roving finger. Three young-old faces looked up at her from the shining chrome, but when she whirled around to see, they were not there. She had known it. They were nowhere, yet she saw them in every store window, in every passing car, in every low, tight voice. She had read of such things; now, in the table-top, circled by a ring of spilled coffee, was terror, grinning up at her in a merciless death's smile.

Miss Riley had been born of a wealthy Yankee-Irish father, whom she adored, and in her celibate girlhood, emulated in every way. She learned to do his accounts and she learned to play good golf, and she learned to tell a good stock from a bad one. Her mother was sweet and soft and often lonely, and sometimes she would sit outside her husband's study and watch the two together, and she would become wistful and perhaps cry a little. They rarely noticed her.

Miss Riley had become a schoolteacher. She never married. While her parents were alive, she lived with them in a giant, old house surrounded by a great expanse of garden and lawn. One night her father died, and her mother, whose every hour without him was pain, hurried after him a few days later. Miss Riley was 46 then; she moved to a small apartment of her own, and sold the great, old house. She was sad, looking at it for the last time, but because her father was a Yankee, she clasped her hands and walked briskly off.

She had no close friends but she was companionable with the teachers and they admired her if they did not like her.

She had stood behind the same desk for 32 years. She had seen so much come and go, and now the legends had grown around her: stories of how her lover had been killed on the way to their wedding; of how she was afraid of fire because her father and mother had been killed in one. She heard them and laughed and still stood, at 60, behind the desk and taught the history of England and the history of France.

She had seen the tough boys and conquered them, and they adored her for it and called her tough. It was a compliment and it pleased her to hear them say it, so she faced them as they came, cold and straight, gazing out at them through rimless glasses.

Then things changed and the face

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of fear became known to her . . . and somehow it was different and terrible.

Three boys sat with a class in September. They sat, one behind the other, and looked up at her, and each one wore a very slight grin, but she noticed it. It was her custom on the first day of school to lay down the law. This day she stood in front of her desk, unbending and stern, outlining the year. The three boys grinned, but it wasn't really grinning. She noticed that the ends of their mouths turned up in a mirthless way, and it was ugly.

There was the leader, Jeffrey White, a good-looking, slender boy with cold eyes and light, short-clipped hair. His school record had been brilliant up until a few years before, when his mother had died and his father had lost his job. Henry Voking had dark eyes. They were lonely eyes. His mouth was often twisted into a practice grimace of scorn. His father was a drunkard with an uncontrollable temper. His mother worked hard to support the family. Larry Crane lived with his aunt, but he didn't go there much. "She's got five kids of her own," he had once been heard to say, "and she just don't want me around." These three had been rejected; and they rejected all. They were not three but one.

One day Miss Riley found Jeffrey and Larry methodically ripping a schoolbook into small pieces. She had them suspended from school. For two weeks, Henry Voking was also absent, and Miss Riley visited his home to find out why. His father, a bearded man in a dirty undershirt, said that Henry had been helping him. It was a lie and they both knew it, but Miss Riley left. She wrinkled up her fine nose at the smell of the place.

One Monday of the third week, the three returned. And then, in a week they were gone. The rumor went that they were hitch-hiking to Florida. Miss Riley shrugged when she heard it.

She rarely thought of them. Until one afternoon in late January when it was dark and cold and she was glad to be home reading.

She did not hear them come in and they stood in the doorway until she noticed them. Larry, with the dark, brooding face, lit a cigarette with one swift motion, before she was able to speak. He smiled at her.

She spat at them in her thin, New England voice: "How dare you come into my home! How dare you! You're hoodlums, rotten hoodlums, and you're a disgrace!" Her anger . . . she trembled with rage. "What kind of parents do you have who let you walk the streets this way?"

Jeffrey White grinned slowly and yet there was pain in his eyes. "Don't you talk about my mother that way," he said. And he laughed. They all laughed, and then they walked out, slowly, through her open door.

They called her all the time after that. She knew who it was; the phone would ring and she would answer and say "Hello? hello?" and then a louder "Hello?" and then she would hear

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the click on the other end, and that low, dismal buzz. For a while she tried not answering the phone, but as she sat in her darkness and the phone sang out louder and more insistent, it was almost a relief to answer it and hear the silence beyond.

In school they noticed that she looked tired. They said she was getting old. Her eyes were rimmed and her mouth was lined and weary. She sat on the chair that she had never sat upon, for in her 32 years she had stood behind the desk and had scoffed at those who sat. "It's good exercise," she had said. Now she said nothing. Now the lines deepened.

The boys did not come to school any longer. Somebody told her that they had quit. She sighed. She felt tired and lost.

Once they called at 4 o'clock in the morning. She had the call traced to a phone booth in an all-night restaurant and the proprietor said that there had been some kids in but they had left. He was sorry, he said. He didn't want any trouble, he said. If he saw them again, he'd get a cop.

She did not call the police. Although she was frightened, she was a New England Yankee, and she was self-sufficient. She told herself just that, every time the phone rang and she frantically called "Hello?" into the receiver. She told herself that, every time her fingers reached, involuntarily for the phone, to call for help, for company. She was a New England Yankee, and self-sufficient.

One night in February, they called again. There was an ice storm. It was wildly ravaging the city, and Miss Riley sat alone in her kitchenette, drinking coffee. She tapped on the table with her fingertips. She drummed out a marching song that she had learned in school many years ago. Then her phone rang.

She let it ring twice and then she moved to answer it. She knew what it would be; yet something made her reach for the phone. She whispered into it in a cracked voice that she did not recognize as her own, "Leave me alone. Please leave me alone." At the other end she heard a door slam. Then nothing. She clicked the receiver and silence greeted her heavily. They had left the receiver off the hook, and now her phone was useless to her. She stood holding it in her hand, then quietly replaced it.

She went into the kitchen. She thought of going downstairs to the janitor, and she almost did, but then she sat down at the table, and after a while she dropped her head into her hands and let the storm whirl around her . . .

There was no school because all the teachers went to the funeral. Somebody told somebody that the three boys were down in the park. A group went to see them.

"What have they got on 'em?" asked one. "What can they do to 'em?"

"Not a thing," said a tall boy. "Her heart gave out. What does anybody care why?"

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Somebody frowned. Somebody shrugged.

Three boys came by. They did not smile. They walked in the sunlight with their heads up, looking defiantly about them, but Henry Voking's eyes were red-rimmed. They walked close to each other by the crowd of boys.

The three boys moved slowly down the street and the watchers waited silently until they were gone. One turned to the others.

"Well?" he said.

The second contributor to our Children's Hour is a nine-year-old Irish boy. Apparently he had read the first Children's Hour, in our July 1954 issue, and found the challenge irresistible. In the letter accompanying his story, young Brian O'Sullivan wrote: "Dear Ellery Queen, The storeys in your Childrens hour were marvellous and I think your magazine is the best in the world." Now, none of your blarney, lad — but what editor could resist so grand an opening sentence?

Brian's father is a mystery-story writer (DON'T HANG ME TOO HIGH *and* SOMEONE WALKED OVER MY GRAVE, *among others*) *— so the son comes by it naturally. His mother does the typing for her author-men — that is, when she has spare time which (to quote from Brian's first letter) "she hasent much of becase she has 3 children to look after."*

Mr. O'Sullivan was seventeen when he had his first story published, so he has warned Master O'Sullivan not to let his nine-year-old family record go to his head!

While it was a "real thrill" for young Brian to have his story accepted, he went on to state: "I must say I am looking forward to receiving the money." But the lad had good reasons for thinking in terms of cash: he wanted to get a doll's house and doll's furniture for sister Barbara — "her heart is set on them and she's had a hard time this year, with chicken pox, measles, and getting her tonsils out"; and some toy lorries for brother Jim — "he's 2½ — we call him the Red-Headed Terror — he's impossible"; and an electric train set for the author himself; and a wire recorder for Daddy — "but I think he'll have to wait until I write a few more stories!" And gifts for Mammy — "including a new typewriter ribbon!"

And now, Brian O'Sullivan's story . . .

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A MAN LIKE HIS DADDY

by BRIAN O'SULLIVAN

We live in a very nice place called Clondalkin, in County Dublin. My favorite friend is Michael Maher who lives near us. He was not always my favorite friend. I am nine and he is only seven and he was always hanging around the gang I played with. We used to tell him he was too young and to run home to his mama.

Then his mama went to the hospital for an operation and she never came back. My mama gave Michael his meals, sent him off to school, and looked after him during the day while his daddy was working. His daddy was a policeman and Michael said he wanted to be a man like his daddy when he grew up. He wanted to direct traffic and arrest burglars and bring them to jail.

His mama was a very nice lady. I heard my daddy say one day that she was almost as pretty as my own mama. My mama slapped him with a dishcloth and said: "*Plámás* won't get you anywhere."

When Michael's mama went to the hospital and didn't come back, Mr. Maher got very sick. He used to come home late from work and stagger from side to side up our path to get Michael to bring him home to bed. He looked very sick and never laughed any more like he used to. My daddy always said: "Take it easy, Tom."

And Mr. Maher said: "What do you know about it?"

My daddy said: "Think of the kid, Tom."

Mr. Maher looked very angry and said: "If he's a nuisance, I'll take him away."

My daddy said: "I didn't mean that."

Michael used to ask us why his mama wasn't coming back. My mama used to look at my daddy but they did not seem to know what to say. Then one day Michael stopped asking and he never asked again. He said his daddy was sending him to a boarding school in September. He didn't want to go.

One day after tea at our house Michael and I met the gang and we played games in his back garden. The gang wanted to play rocket ships but Michael wanted to play cowboys and Indians. So we played cowboys and Indians. We were tired of playing rocket ships, anyway.

Michael threw a rope over a branch of a tree and tied a noose round his neck. Then he sat on his rocking horse and said: "I must be the good man and you must be the rustlers. Brian is the bad man who pretends I am the king of the rustlers and they're going to lynch me. The bad man slaps my horse to make it run away but it won't budge. I seen it in

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the cinema. They put the good man on another horse but just then his pal comes along."

I didn't want to play.

I said it was a dangerous game. Michael might get choked and die.

One of the gang named Liam said: "My daddy read in the papers about kids getting strangled putting ropes round their necks and doing cowboy tricks."

Michael said: "That's silly! I saw my daddy doing it in the bedroom after tea."

Author's Solution to

MERLINI AND THE LIE DETECTOR

SYNOPSIS: Script writer Don Sutton reported the murder of TV producer Carl Todd in the latter's 44th Street apartment. On the scene of the crime the police found Sutton and actress Helen Lowe. The victim's smashed wrist-watch indicated he had been killed at 6:01 P.M. during a summer thunderstorm that stopped abruptly at 6:05 P.M. Both suspects claimed to have arrived ten to twelve minutes after the rain had stopped, and each said the other was already there with the body.

Merlini suggested using an impromptu lie detector to discover which suspect was the liar and, therefore, the murderer. He started the motor of Miss Lowe's car, and then Sutton's. Looking at the windshield of Sutton's car, Inspector Gavigan said, "We make the arrest now."

SOLUTION: Merlini turned in his seat to face Helen Lowe and Don Sutton. "My impromptu lie detector is a mechanical gadget found on all cars. When I started the motor of Miss Lowe's car, the radio she had neglected to turn off when she parked began to operate. When I turned the ignition key in Sutton's car, something similar but much more significant happened — the windshield wipers began working.

"If Sutton, as he claims, was twenty blocks uptown at 60th Street when the rain stopped, he'd have turned the wipers off a moment or so later. They wouldn't have sprung into action just now when I started the motor. The fact that they did means they were still turned on when he parked here — and that means *he arrived before the rain stopped.* He lied when he said he got here after the storm and after Todd was killed."

Sutton didn't try to deny it. He stared hopelessly at the wiper blades moving like twin robots back and forth across the dry glass, monotonously repeating their accusation of guilt.

CLAYTON RAWSON

(*For names of winners see page 97*)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	MIGNON G. EBERHART
TITLE:	*The Wagstaff Pearls*
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	James Wickwire, elderly banker
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Jewels are meant for beautiful women. That is why, sometimes, a beautiful woman will do anything for . . . pearls.*

AT MIDNIGHT THE TELEPHONE RANG and a woman's voice said, "Mr. Wickwire?"

I had been asleep. I was only half awake. I said, "Yes? Who — who is . . . ?"

She cried, in an agitated, incoherent way, "This is Frances Dune. I'm sorry to call you now but — I can't wait. I've got to tell you. My conscience —" She took a long rasping breath, "It's the Wagstaff pearls —"

There was a thud and clatter as if the telephone dropped, a kind of dull crash, and then a scream. It was a terrible scream, which gradually, as if from an increasing distance, died away. Then there was nothing.

I pressed the telephone against my ear. Frances Dune was my secretary, and the Wagstaff pearls were in my care. I knew that something was very wrong and I didn't like that scream. Suddenly I heard rapid breathing, and somebody began to dial.

I cried, "Miss Dune! What is it? Miss Dune!"

The dialing stopped. "Oh, Mr. Wickwire, I didn't know you were still on the phone. Miss Dune — I tried to stop her — I couldn't —"

She sounded hysterical. I snapped, "Who is this?"

"I'm — I'm Muriel Evans. I work in the bank. Mr. Wickwire, she killed herself —"

The scream echoed horribly in my ear, put an edge to my voice. "Where are you?"

"Her apartment," she quavered.

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"Give me the address."

She gave it to me in a voice that was still shaking.

"Call the police. I'll be right there. Don't let anybody else come into the place. Call them — wait a minute. How did she kill herself? Are you sure she's dead?"

Miss Evans seemed to swallow hard. "She jumped out the window. It's the ninth floor."

With another cold wave of horror I realized that there wouldn't be much use in calling a doctor.

Ten minutes later I was dressed and in a taxi. My house is in the upper sixties; we hurtled down Park Avenue. I was all too certain that I knew what had happened. Rarely but sometimes, things like that do happen in a bank. The trusted teller walks away with cash; the reliable cashier disappears with negotiable bonds. This time my perfect secretary had stolen the Wagstaff pearls.

My name is James Wickwire. I am a banker, a bachelor. I am indeed elderly enough to be one of the senior vice presidents. The Wagstaff pearls had been in my care for some twelve years since Mrs. Wagstaff had died. Her estate was left to minors; its administration was in the care of trustees. I was one of them and I had a power of attorney for the estate.

I was under the authority of the other trustees, but I could open the Wagstaff Estate safe deposit boxes. In one of those boxes, enclosed in a flat box of blue velvet, lay the Wagstaff pearls, wasting their beauty.

They were rather a nuisance because, twice a year, they had to be taken out of the vault and worn for one entire day.

Banks do many odd chores for old and valued clients and this was one of those chores. Twice a year one of the girls in the bank was sent down to the vault, the pearls were clasped around her neck (next to her skin, one of Mrs. Wagstaff's requirements), and there she sat, reading a book for the entire day.

At closing time the pearls were returned to their blue box and to the vault for another six months. I could never see that their lustre was in any way improved thereby, but that had been Mrs. Wagstaff's idea. She had charged me directly with the pearls.

It was a cold, raw night with the traffic lights reflected in eerie streaks on the wet pavement, yet I could see Mrs. Wagstaff against the night as clearly, almost, as I had seen her during what proved to be my last talk with her. I could see her bedroom, luxurious with feminine fripperies. I could see her sitting up against the pillow, with her white hair neatly arranged and her veined, small hands caressing the pearls. "They must be worn, you understand," she told me. "Otherwise they lose their lustre. They must be worn by a woman and, Jim —" She was one of the few women who have ever called me Jim — "one of the girls in the bank will have to do it. I'm glad you have such pretty girls working in the bank."

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Prettiness is not exactly a qualification for any bank employee. Perhaps my face showed perplexity for she smiled.

"Pearls are meant for beautiful women. I was — they said I was beautiful once," she smiled, and a luminous quality of beauty flashed out and touched something in my heart. "My husband used to say that only beautiful women really love pearls. Beauty calls for beauty." She laughed, but rather sadly. "Of course he didn't mean it, but he said that is why, sometimes, a beautiful woman will do anything for jewels — for pearls like these." She sighed. A nurse rustled forward. I kissed her small hand before I went away; I don't know why.

It was my last talk with Mrs. Wagstaff. But I had seen to it that her wishes about the pearls were observed. That is, they were worn regularly. I did not subscribe to her notion about beauty and pearls. I put that down to sentiment. Certainly I could not hold, in effect, beauty contests in the bank. Frances Dune had worn the pearls that day.

That, too, was my own direct responsibility. I had had occasion to be out of the office from noon till after the bank closed. I had returned to my own house about 11. Miss Dune, looking at my calendar that morning, had reminded me of the pearls, and I had sent her to wear them because I should not require her services. Miss Dune had been my secretary for nearly ten years. She was a tall, extremely plain woman of about 40, very neat, rather meagre somehow, fussy and overconscientious in a way, but efficient. I had trusted her.

Yet as soon as she spoke to me in that frenzied way over the telephone I knew what had happened. I had left it to her to check in the pearls with Mr. Wazey, manager of the vaults; I had overstepped my power of attorney to the extent of giving him my key, without which he could not have opened the safe deposit box. Obviously, Mr. Wazey had taken the velvet box, without looking inside it, returned it to the safe deposit box, and gone home. Miss Dune had taken the pearls.

Then, overcome by remorse, she had telephoned to confess it and had jumped out of the window rather than face the consequences. It was tragic and it was pathetic — this plain, hard-working woman conquered by the beauty of a strand of pearls.

And they were beautiful; no question of that. But times have changed. When Mrs. Wagstaff — young then — had been given the pearls, her husband had paid nearly a quarter of a million for them; I knew that. I also knew that their value was nothing like that now. The old-time high market for pearls is no more. The popularity of cultured pearls — flawless, too, but plentiful — has done that.

We arrived at an apartment house not far from the river. Already the street was lighted up. Police cars and an ambulance were there, and there

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were lights from windows all around and heads craning out of them.

A lieutenant of police, a big, burly fellow who looked rather strained and white, asked me to identify the body, and I did. The night seemed very cold; my gray topcoat was insufficient to keep out a chill that seemed to clutch my very bones. Then the ambulance moved closer. I went with the lieutenant to Miss Dune's apartment on the ninth floor.

It was a small apartment, a bedroom-sitting room with a tiny kitchenette. It was painstakingly neat and rather sparse and meagre. Like Miss Dune.

A girl sat in a stiff chair; she rose as we came in. I recognized her only vaguely; she worked in the bookkeeping department of the bank, and I rarely saw her.

"I'm Muriel Evans, Mr. Wickwire," she said in a low voice. She was slender, dressed simply in red. She wore lipstick and matching nail polish, a custom I rather oppose in the bank, but certainly if the girls chose to wear nose rings outside the bank it was none of my business. However, she was quiet and well-behaved in a very trying and, indeed, a terrible situation.

I nodded. "This is the young lady who reported it," I told the lieutenant. I still felt cold and rather sick.

He removed his cap. "I'll have to ask you for a statement, Miss," he said. "I realize it's been a shock but —" He was sorry for her; I could see that.

She began to talk, and I glanced around the room. She had replaced the telephone in its cradle. A chair lay on its side on the floor. It accounted for the dull crash I had heard. The window, a long window, too near the floor, was still open. "Miss Dune telephoned to me about eleven," Miss Evans was saying. "I live near here, two streets north. She said she couldn't sleep; she was nervous and she asked me to come over. I didn't know her well, but she was rather important, you see, at the bank, being Mr. Wickwire's secretary. Of course I came — and she told me she'd taken the Wagstaff pearls. They were in the vault and —"

"I'll explain that," I told the lieutenant and did so briefly.

The lieutenant said, "Take it easy now, Miss Evans. Was she hysterical?"

"Yes! Oh, yes! I didn't believe her. She said she had to talk — it seemed to come out in spite of herself. She was crying and — well, I didn't believe her. I couldn't. I thought she was ill, nervous, something wrong. Anyway, I went into the kitchen. I intended to make some coffee. I didn't know what to do. While I was there I heard her at the telephone. She telephoned to Mr. Wickwire — I could hear her — and started to tell him what she'd done. But then she dropped the phone as if she couldn't go on. I ran from the kitchen and — and she was pulling up the window. I caught at her and — I don't know what I did. But I couldn't stop her —" She put her hands over her face.

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The lieutenant put a large hand kindly on her shoulder. "It's been tough — take it easy."

I said, "Where are the pearls?"

The girl, Muriel Evans, looked up with a start. She had light brown hair, parted in the middle and drawn up on her head. It was the kind of hair, fine and soft, that seems to make a nimbus around a girl's face. She had blue eyes, set in finely arched hollows. It struck me that in spite of her shock she was rather attractive. "I don't know," she said. "She wouldn't show them to me. That's why I didn't believe her."

"We'll find them," the lieutenant said. "The pearls or a pawn ticket."

I went to the telephone. "Is it all right for me to use this?"

He hesitated. "Well, the fact is, Mr. Wickwire, it's suicide, but I have to go through some formalities — fingerprints and all that. Do you mind using another telephone?"

Miss Evans's blue eyes leaped to sudden darkness. "But it *was* suicide! I saw her —"

"I understand," the lieutenant said quickly. "Don't get scared, Miss. It's not a question of murder. Besides if you'd murdered her —"

"Oh —" Miss Evans gave a kind of gasp.

He patted her shoulder. "If you'd murdered her you'd have got the hell — that is, you'd have got out of here. Nobody knew you were here, did they?

She moved her head slowly, saying, no, in a whisper.

"Well, there, you see! You'd have got out. You wouldn't have called the police."

A sergeant and another policeman came in from the hall as I went out. I took the elevator down and used the telephone at the switchboard in the foyer, to rout out Mr. Wazey. The boy on duty watched me, pop-eyed.

"It's terrible," he said. "Miss Dune was sure upset when she phoned for the lady in the red coat. But I never thought of —"

I asked him to get me a taxi.

Banks are supposed to operate through masses of red tape and in a sense they do; they have to. At the same time, in an emergency, there are ways to cut some of that red tape. Mr. Wazey met me at the bank and went into the vaults and got out the flat velvet box. When we opened it there were pearls lying on the satin lining. But the sight of those pearls shook me in a way that even Miss Dune's tragic confession had not done — *for they were not the Wagstaff pearls!* They were not pearls at all, but dull and waxy fakes; they proved that the theft had been planned. And a moment of passionate impulse, and a carefully planned theft are two different things.

"I looked at them," Mr. Wazey panted, his round face very pale. "When I replaced the box I glanced inside it. But I didn't notice. I'm no connoisseur of pearls. Besides it was Miss Dune."

She had never been delegated to

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wear the pearls before that day. I was fairly sure of that but we checked the records Mr. Wazey had kept. I could not remember when I had actually looked at the pearls myself so, for accuracy, I ran down the entire list of names.

Some of the girls whose names appeared there had married or drifted to other jobs; and many of the girls had worn the pearls twice or even three times, but practically every girl in the bank had worn the pearls at some time. Miss Busch had worn them three times; Miss Smith, twice; Miss Evans (Muriel Evans, the girl in the apartment), twice; Miss Wilkins, three times — Miss Dune, only once.

But she'd have known all about them from my Wagstaff file, so she had prepared herself for an opportunity. And she had reminded me of the date and made the opportunity. My heart was heavy as I watched Mr. Wazey lock up the vaults. Then I went back through the dismal, rainy night to Miss Dune's apartment.

I had been gone scarcely an hour, but the search of the apartment had been so thorough that it looked as if a hurricane had struck it. Muriel Evans still sat in the armchair. She was pale, and something in the texture of her face made me think (although absently) of a magnolia. The lieutenant had unbuttoned his blue coat and was wiping his forehead. "They're not here, Mr. Wickwire," he said rather desperately. "No pawn ticket. Nothing."

I have never been one to shirk my duty, even if unpleasant. I had to report not only to the insurance company but to the trustees of the estate and the officers of the bank, exactly how I had permitted this thing to happen. I made my way past the debris of cushions, books, untidy heaps of clothing to the window and looked down, so far down to the street that I felt queerly dizzy and sick again. Poor tragic Miss Dune who had paid with her life for the pearls, entrusted to me! Again I could almost see the still beautiful woman who had put her delicate old hands in mine and given the pearls into my keeping. I could almost see her smile, and hear her voice.

I stood at the window, it seemed to me, for a long time; in fact I suppose it was only a few seconds while I made up my mind to undertake the only course of action that I could determine. I turned back to the lieutenant. "Is it all right for me to go now?"

The lieutenant nodded. "I'll report to you. We'll get started with the pawn shops and jewelers. We'll get the pearls back."

I thanked him. I said to Miss Evans, "Do you mind coming to my house with me? I have to dictate a full report of this."

The light fell fully on her magnolia face. She nodded, and picked up her coat. While she preceded me to the elevator I lingered, to speak to the lieutenant. I gave a concise word or two of directions and joined Miss Evans as the elevator came.

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We found a taxi at once. Neither of us spoke all the way uptown. When we got to my house I got out my latch key. "My manservant is on his vacation," I said, and let her into the hall. "I'm going to have a whiskey and soda. Will you join me?"

She refused but thanked me with a lift of her shadowed, lovely blue eyes. Then I said, "You might know. Did Miss Dune have a — well, I suppose one would say a boy friend? Some man —"

She gave me a quiet but intelligent look. "That occurred to me, too. You mean, someone might have planned this and might have influenced her to take the pearls. Yes, I think so. Once or twice I've seen her with a man. I'm not sure that I could identify him. I might be able to. But I feel sure that she wouldn't have done that unless she was urged to do it. Some man, someone younger perhaps — But it seems cruel to say or think it."

My study is at the right of the hall, and I took her there and told her to sit down. A tray with decanter and glasses stood on my desk. I mixed myself a rather strong whiskey and soda, then I opened a drawer of the desk and took out my revolver.

"What —" Miss Evans began, sitting upright.

I took out the box of shells and loaded the gun. "I don't like the idea of a man. By now he knows what has happened. He might be dangerous." I put the loaded gun down on the table and went into the hall to the street door. I opened it. The street was deserted. I went back to the study and closed the door. The house was extraordinarily quiet.

I picked up my glass and went to the window. The curtains had not been closed; the room behind me was reflected in the glittering, black windowpanes. I took rather a long drink. Then I said, "Where are the pearls?"

The figure in the cherry red dress stiffened.

I said, "You've worn the pearls twice — once six months ago, once a year and a half ago. One of those times you changed them for false pearls. No one saw the difference until today. Miss Dune saw that they were not the Wagstaff pearls; probably she looked up the record herself. She sent for you tonight to tell you to give them up and you —"

Her head lifted. "I reported the suicide. I wouldn't have done that if —"

"You had to report it. The boy at the switchboard knew that you were there."

The red dress flashed. I am not a brave man but I had to go on, "You killed her."

I heard then a kind of metallic click behind me. I turned. She was standing beside the table, facing me. Her beauty leaped out like a flame. But she had my gun in her hand, and it was pointed at me.

I am not a brave man and I swiftly decided that I wasn't very smart either. "You can't do that!"

"I have to," she said. Her voice was low and melodious, her face

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as lovely as the stars and as fateful. "The pearls are in my apartment. I intended to hide them, but I'll not have time for that. You'd tell the police. But the pearls were your responsibility and everyone knows how you feel about the bank and — they'll say this is suicide, too." She put her finger on the trigger.

I hadn't heard anyone enter the hall through the street door which I had been at some pains to open. But the study door smashed open and the room was flooded with policemen and the gun went off but the bullet went straight through the ceiling.

"Of course she'd snatch at the idea of some man who might have the pearls. And you had to have an excuse for the gun. That was pretty smart, sir," the lieutenant said later.

I said wearily, "I had no facts, nothing I could tell you. I could not make so serious a charge without facts. But I thought that if she were guilty, if I accused her and I gave her a chance to get hold of the gun, she'd try to get rid of me. Thanks for getting here as I asked you to do, Lieutenant."

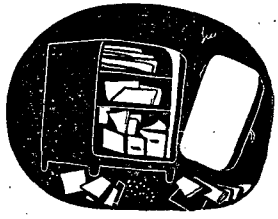
He eyed me over his glass with a certain respect. "You are a real detective."

"No, the detective in this case was — well, never mind." He wouldn't have understood. The detective was a lady who had smiled at me and said, "Beauty calls for beauty — that is why, sometimes, a beautiful woman will do anything for jewels."

Yet perhaps he would have understood, for he said, a trifle wistfully, "That girl really stacked up. A beauty, wouldn't you say? You didn't exactly see it at first. But gradually — yes, sir, I guess that Helen of Troy dame might have looked something like that."

He seemed to fumble deep down in his consciousness, for an idea. "I guess that's why she wanted the pearls —" he said, gave me an abashed glance, murmured, "So long as I'm off duty," and lifted his glass toward me.

I lifted my glass, too; but I drank my toast to another beautiful woman.



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Louis Bromfield's EARLY AUTUMN *won the Pulitzer Prize in 1927. The author of* THE GREEN BAY TREE, THE STRANGE CASE OF MISS ANNIE SPRAGG, *and* THE FARM *has seen his later novels — like* THE RAINS CAME *and* MRS. PARKINGTON *— transformed into super-budget Class-A films which have spread the name of Louis Bromfield to the four corners of the world. Once upon a time, however, Mr. Bromfield promised his readers that in his writing he would devote himself exclusively to the American scene; alas, he did not keep that promise, but you will find in "Tabloid News" a tale of passion and murder that only an American could have written — an authentic American story, native to its deepest roots.*

TABLOID NEWS

by LOUIS BROMFIELD

HOMER DILWORTH WAS BORN IN 1881 and they hanged him by the neck until dead only last Tuesday, so he was only 50 when he died in the prime of life. He was younger than most men of 50. He was solider, rosier, clearer-eyed. His voice was alive, and his skin was soft and young. And the funny thing is that he was younger at 50 than he was at 40.

He was even younger when he died than he was at 30. He'd always been rather sour-faced and dry and bony, like a handsome tree withered by blight. And then, all at once, when he was 48 he suddenly turned young.

In a way, to have hanged him was worse than killing most young fellows, because Homer had his youth so late in life. He turned young all of a sudden, like an old apple tree blossoming carelessly in October.

His parents were respectable folk and very religious. The old woman was a little queer, and they lived in a little town called Hanover, and Homer was an only child. 'Way back when he was a boy, little towns like that didn't have theaters or movies or automobiles or radios, and everything centered about the church. There was going to church on Sunday, and church sociables and strawberry festivals, and then, about once a year, a big revival meeting, when everything broke loose.

It was like that in Hanover. They were awful strict but just as much love-making went on there as anywhere else, only they made it nasty in Hanover.

His mother and father wanted Homer, their only son, to be a preacher, and Homer thought he wanted to be one. He took it all seriously and talked a lot about purity

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and the devil. He used to harangue me a good deal. We had a kind of Damon and Pythias friendship.

The other night I was thinking back over his story and I remembered a few things, mostly in pictures, the way you remember things when you're beginning to grow old. There was a swimming hole about three miles from town where we used to go swimming together. It was a clear stream and in the middle of a wide pasture it spread out into a kind of pond.

A couple of hundred feet away there was a low hill with a house on it, but nobody lived in the house and it was falling into ruin. It was partly log cabin and partly clapboard and all the windows were broken and the bushes had grown up high around it.

There was a story about the house which happened before my time. They said that a certain old man known as Elder Sammis had lived there once and that he'd beaten his daughter to death when he found that she'd got into trouble.

He didn't mean to beat her as bad as that, but when he found she was dead he put her body in a box under the bed and ran away, and they found the dead girl there two weeks later. They tried to catch him but they never did, because about a month later he jumped off a river boat and was drowned.

So nobody lived in the house and everybody was scared of it, so there wasn't any reason why we couldn't swim there in peace.

After Homer was hanged, one of the pictures I remembered was that swimming hole on an afternoon in early June when he'd come over from the Theological Seminary to spend Sunday with his folks. The water was clear and the sunlight was hot, and after we'd swum about a bit and splashed at each other like a couple of kids, we got out of the water and lay on the grass and talked.

We lay there almost in the shadow of the empty old home and for a long time we didn't say anything. It was beautiful, with the sun on our bodies and the soft grass under us and a warm breeze blowing over us.

A calf came up and sniffed at me and went away again, and it struck me all of a sudden how beautiful Homer was lying there in the sun. He was like the ideas some people have about the Greeks, which aren't true probably but are kind of idealized.

That afternoon he was preachier than ever. He went after me for going on buggy rides at night with old man Fisher's girl, and for not believing in God. And he began to hash over a lot of ideas about purity that didn't make any sense, and all the time I wanted to get up and laugh and dance, because it seemed so funny to hear all that claptrap coming out of the mouth of a young fellow, sitting on the grass beside that clear stream.

I wanted to laugh but I kept my mouth shut, and then he said something that made me want to cry. I'm not emotional or sentimental,

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but I guess it must have been the feel of the grass and the sun and the warm breeze that made me feel that way. He said, "I don't care for myself, Buck. It's because when I go to heaven I want to find you there, too."

And then the sun disappeared. It had slipped down behind the desolate Sammis house and was shining through the empty holes where the windows used to be, and the breeze wasn't so warm any more and I began to pull on my clothes; and then Homer, seeing that all his talk wasn't having any effect, began to dress, too.

After we dressed we sat around for a while and Homer said presently, "Let's go up and look through old Sammis's house."

We'd never done it as kids on account of the story that Hester Sammis's ghost was always in the house. I don't believe in ghosts, and that afternoon I knew for the first time that it wasn't really the thought of ghosts which had scared me but something else. I knew that it was because of the sadness that clung to the old house itself.

We didn't go into the house, but all the way home he kept kidding me about being afraid of ghosts and I didn't try to explain to him. Lately, I've been thinking I was wrong not to have talked about it and that if I'd tried as hard to convert him as he tried to convert me, they mightn't have hanged him last Tuesday.

The trouble was that I was finding my heaven right here on earth and not worrying much about what happened afterwards, and he was afraid of this earth and worrying himself about the next and he wanted me to be in heaven with him. I guess he cared a lot more for me than I knew in those days.

It was that afternoon that he told me he was going to get married as soon as he was out of college. I was glad, because I thought it would be good for him.

But I didn't see the girl until after they were married and came back to Hanover to live. He didn't become a preacher, after all, because his uncle died and left his hardware store to Homer's father and Homer's father thought it over and decided the cash drawer of a good-paying hardware store was better than the rewards of saving souls.

So Homer came back to Hanover to live and set up his wife in a house alongside his parents' house and took over the hardware store.

The hardware business flourished because Homer was honest and reliable and sold only the best hardware, and his father kind of looked after the business, because Homer wasn't very good about things like that. He was really romantic and all that squeezing into a hard pious shell couldn't change that in him. It was always bursting out somewhere.

After he got married he took to reading all kinds of romantic novels like *The Three Musketeers*. He really wanted to travel to places alone, looking for adventures, but he'd got himself married when he was twenty-one

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and his wife had twins, and after that there was a baby about every eighteen months until there were five, so he couldn't very well do anything but look after the store and take care of the children when his wife Etta was doing church work.

And his wife wasn't much. I'm kind of an idealist, and before he got married, I always pictured him taking up with a woman who was as fine and beautiful as himself. There was something wonderful in the idea of a beautiful girl marrying such a handsome fellow as Homer and in their having a lot of beautiful children.

But when he came back and invited me to supper one night to meet Etta, I felt kind of sick when I saw her. I knew right away that Homer had been up to his old tricks. He'd married the kind of woman he'd been brought up to marry and not the kind he'd been meant by Nature to marry.

She didn't take to me and I certainly didn't like her, and after that first meeting, Homer and I began to see less and less of each other. She was the kind of woman who wasn't going to let her husband have any friends.

It wasn't just women. She wouldn't let him have men friends, either. And I guess she thought I was the devil himself, so she wouldn't even let Homer go on trying to save my soul so I could be in heaven with him.

Once she buttonholed me on the street and called me a sot and harangued me until I got away from her, and after that Homer was ashamed and he'd walk around a block or go into a store if he saw me coming. I guess there's lots of women like her in America.

Of course, with all that going on, she didn't have much time for housework. The children were always sick and the dishes were never washed, and Homer used to have to stay at home to look after the children and take care of the house while she went to meetings and traveled about lecturing and haranguing.

I always thought he had too much character to do things like that, but I guess she just wore him down with abuse and whining and nagging. But he did have enough character to preserve a kind of dignity in spite of everything. He just gave up going out anywhere and lived between his house and the hardware store. He was crazy about his children.

But marriage didn't do him much good. Instead of growing fat on it like most men, he seemed to grow dry. He looked older than he was and there were hard lines in his face that oughtn't to have been there, and I only found out the reason when he sent for me at the Mitchellville jail after he got into trouble.

When I got word that he wanted to see me, I could have died of surprise, because he hadn't seen me in fifteen years for more than long enough to say "Howdydo" when we passed in the street. I guess his mind must have gone back a long way, beyond Etta and all she'd done to him, to that day when we went swimming together for

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the last time and lay on the soft grass behind the haunted Sammis house.

Sitting there in the cell of the Mitchellville jail, he told me all about Etta and about everything else, too. After the fifth child was born, she told him the doctor said if she had another child it would kill her, so they couldn't live together as man and wife any more. And that happened before Homer was 30. So for seventeen years they lived together as if they weren't married.

The summer that Homer was 48 Etta said she had to have a rest because she was all worn out. Homer didn't want to go away but she kept nagging him, and at last he left the hardware store with his clerk and his oldest boy and they went up to La Vallette. He was looking bad himself, all gray and dried-up.

He hardly spoke to anybody any more, and just lived between his home and the store. He'd just given up all his old friends, and somehow he'd got all bitter inside.

La Vallette is a little town up on the lake where all sorts of religious cranks go for a cheap rest. There are some cottages and three or four cheap hotels and a wooden tabernacle.

Homer and Etta were just like all the others. Etta, of course, knew most of the dreary lot. She'd made herself into a kind of celebrity. They all knew the crusader, Mrs. Etta Dallet Dilworth. I guess she enjoyed it a great deal, holding court in a rocking chair on the hotel porch and speaking now and then at the tabernacle, but Homer got a bit fed up being just *Mister* Etta Dallet Dilworth and he took to going for long walks along the lake front.

It was a desolate country but beautiful in a wild way. There were miles and miles of dunes with the whitest sand glittering in the sunlight. And here and there were marshes and inlets where wild birds settled.

Homer went walking along the shore in and out among the dunes, skirting the marshes. At first he'd go off for an hour or two, and then he began to go off in the morning and stay until lunch time, and then one day he began taking a box lunch with him.

He'd been unhappy for so long that he liked to get away from people and hide. I guess getting away from Etta and the pack of gabblers who surrounded her was kind of a relief, too. And being away all day like that got him to thinking.

It's dangerous for a man of 48 to think too much about his own happiness, especially when he's had a life like Homer's. And the marshes and the lake and the sunlight and the wild birds began to do things to him.

He said it was like slipping backwards. He kept going back and back until he got to feeling a little the way he used to feel when we went swimming together. And one day he found himself taking off all his clothes and lying down on the clean white sand among the dunes to eat his lunch. And all at once he was kind of frightened.

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It was the first time the sun had touched his body since that day he lay on the grass by the haunted house, and the feel of it began to do funny things to him. He sat up and looked at his body and saw suddenly that it wasn't old and soft and fat. It was dry and the muscles were sharp and hard but not rounded the way they'd been when he was young. But it struck him suddenly that he wasn't old. He was 48, though, and wouldn't have many more years of health and vigor. And the feel of the sun and the soft warm breeze made him kind of dizzy.

He said he felt as if he was beginning to grow all over again inside himself. Suddenly he saw that he was happy for the first time in twenty years; but that frightened him and he began to be afraid of sin again, and he got up quickly and put on his clothes.

He tried to give up his long walks but when he stayed at the hotel all he saw were gabbing old women and skinny men, and soon he began going off again for the day among the dunes, and after a day or two he began taking off his clothes again and lying in the sun.

He began to grow tanned all over. His muscles began to grow round and plump and solid again.

He felt happier, and once or twice he got up at 4 in the morning to go out to the lake and see the sun rise. The sun became the center of all his existence. It was kind of as if he had a rendezvous every day with the sun out there among the white dunes.

Sometimes on cloudy days he thought he was going crazy, but as soon as the sun came out he felt all right again, and sure of himself. After a time he began to be troubled because the more he thought of it the more it seemed impossible ever to go back to live at Hanover in that untidy house that Etta kept so badly.

Etta noticed that he went off alone a good deal and she began to nag him about leaving her alone so much and not going to the tabernacle. But he didn't seem to mind even that. He just didn't hear her and managed to endure it until he could escape to the dunes.

One day she made a terrible scene in the dining room because she said he was being too kind to the waitress and looked at her too often.

After it was over she went to the management and demanded that the girl be discharged, but the management wouldn't do it because Etta couldn't prove the girl had done anything at all. They couldn't discharge a girl just because she "looked" at a man. They just transferred her to another table and put an ugly old woman to wait on him and Etta.

After that he really took to noticing the girl for the first time, and he saw that she was big and blonde and voluptuous, and in spite of himself, he began stealing glances at her across the room. Once or twice she saw him and smiled. He knew that what he was doing was sinful and tried to put her out of his mind.

Etta grew more and more difficult.

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He said he thought it was because she couldn't bear to see him looking well and happy. And one day she said she'd told the hotel they were going to leave at the end of the week.

The idea terrified him because it meant the end of the only happiness he'd known since he married her and it meant a return to the awful house in Hanover. He'd been so used to doing what she wanted that he didn't say anything, but that afternoon, while he was lying in the sun, he made up his mind that he wasn't going to leave and go back to Hanover. As he dressed himself, he made up the speech he was going to say to her, repeating it over and over to himself in the silence of the dunes to give himself courage.

He was walking home through the dunes, kicking the white sand and thinking how he meant to defy Etta, when he heard a curlew crying, and looking up to see it, he saw something else. Just ahead of him, lying in a hollow between two dunes, he saw the figures of a man and woman. They were asleep in the sun.

At first he wanted to run, and then he was overcome suddenly by a return of his old bitterness. He was outraged and indignant. And then he saw that, like himself, they had thought themselves alone among the dunes because it was a spot never visited by the people who came to La Vallette.

He tried to run away and could not. He was only able to stand there, his feet fixed in the white sand, staring.

Suddenly he was no longer shocked. These two people were like himself. They weren't like Etta. Like him, they worshipped the sun!

He did not know how long he stood there. The sun slipped down towards the blue lake and the girl stirred, and he saw then for the first time that the Venus of the sands with the golden hair was the waitress over whom Etta had made the scene.

He turned and ran, fearful lest they should discover him, and as he ran he knew that he meant to stay on at La Vallette, and that maybe he would never go back to Hanover at all. When he got home he went to Etta and told her he meant to stay, and when she couldn't find out any reason she tried everything to gain control over him again. She even flung the washbowl on the floor and broke it and dashed her head against the door, but all her hysterics seemed to have no effect upon him.

That night he dared not look for the waitress, because he saw her in a new way and looking at her became intolerable to him.

I imagine she was good-hearted and easy-going and meant well to everybody, and was just born to be good to men and make them happy. She felt sorry for Homer, I guess, being married to a dried-up whiner like Etta.

Anyway whenever he did look at her, she looked back and smiled, and that set Homer to thinking of everything he'd missed and that he was 48 and pretty soon he'd be dead without ever having lived at all.

After that day when he went to walk he tried not to go past the place

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where he'd seen them lying in the sun among the white dunes, but always, in spite of anything he could do, he'd find himself moving towards the spot. Sometimes he found them there and sometimes he didn't. And they never knew that all the time there was someone watching their rendezvous.

And then one day on the streets he saw the boy dressed in a shirt and an old pair of trousers and looking for all the world like himself 30 years ago, and when he asked who he was, they told him that the boy's name was Henry Landis and that he came to La Vallette in summer to take the baggage of the summer people to and from the train.

Then one day the boy disappeared, and Homer asked what had become of him, and they said he'd gone away because his mother had died in Appleton and that he wouldn't be back until next summer.

So Homer went out and bought a cheap handbag and wrote a note and put it inside and asked one of the waitresses to give it to Frieda, the big blonde girl.

Just before he died he told me that he thought he must have been going crazy all that time. Up to the very end he couldn't make out whether he'd been crazy all those years he'd been married to Etta and only began to be sane when he took to lying in the sun among the dunes.

At night he always went to the tabernacle with Etta, but that night right after the second hymn he told Etta he would have to get some air. So she stayed and he went outside and walked down to the boat landing, and there in the shadow of some bushes stood Frieda waiting for him and carrying the handbag he'd sent her.

At first he thought he was going to die of excitement and of fear. He began to shake all over. His teeth chattered and he waited for a little while till he got control of himself before he went forward to meet her.

For a long time they stood looking at each other in the darkness talking awkwardly about the cheap handbag and the moon. He said it was kind of as if all that he'd missed all these years had been rolled up and burst out of him at last. There was so much he wanted to say that he couldn't say anything at all.

They sat down on the grass and all he could do was sit and look at her. The moonlight came through the trees on her hair. I guess she was a pretty swell looker. The people I talked to at the trial told me so. She wasn't very bright and she didn't have any ambition or she could have had almost anything she wanted.

While he was looking at her, he suddenly remembered Etta sitting at the tabernacle waiting for him to return, and he said to Frieda, "Will you meet me tomorrow afternoon?" And he told her where to meet him, among the dunes not very far from where he'd seen her and the boy.

He didn't sleep any that night and went off early to spend the day among the dunes. It was a brilliant day, late

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in September, with wonderful sunlight, but it seemed to him the time would never pass until he'd see Frieda coming along the shore.

She came at last, dressed all in white in her waitress' clothes, with her gold hair shining against the blue lake.

And for the first time in his life Homer knew what it was to be free and happy. When he told me about it, it all sounded simple and beautiful. I wanted to cry.

Two days before the hotel closed, Etta came up from the front porch and found a note pinned to the pillow. It said that Homer had gone away and that she needn't try to look for him and that she'd never see him again. He wrote that he'd taken the money that was in the bank at Hanover and left her and the children the hardware store, which would keep them all well enough.

At first they thought he'd committed suicide and Etta fainted and screamed a good deal. They tried dragging the water by the boat landing, but about 6 o'clock one of the waitresses said it wasn't any use because he'd run off with Frieda.

Then Etta screamed and fainted a lot more and took the next train for Hanover, and about two days later the newspapers ran them to ground in a little town up in northern Michigan and printed a lot of stuff about the elopement, so they had to run away again. They kept running from town to town till the newspapermen got tired hounding them, and at last they disappeared.

Etta tried to have them arrested, but nobody could or would do anything about it. She wouldn't divorce him — she just got more and more righteous and martyred. It made an awful scandal in Hanover, but it died down pretty soon.

I was glad because I'd always wanted to see Homer have a little fun in life, but I couldn't say anything. He'd been a stranger to me for twenty years, all dried-up and sour from living with Etta. I couldn't understand how he did manage to do it until two years afterwards when I opened the paper one morning and read that a girl called Frieda Hemyers had been killed with some man and that Homer Dilworth, who had been living with her, was arrested for both murders; and a week later I got a letter from a town called Mitchellville, in Missouri, where they had him in jail.

It was from Homer himself, asking me to come and see him and help him. I went right off, and that was when he told me everything.

I expected to find a dried-up man on the verge of old age, but when they opened the door of the cell I saw a vigorous man of about 35 or 40. I couldn't have believed it was Homer except that he looked like himself when he was young.

He must have grown 15 years younger since I last saw him on the street in Hanover. He was always a good-looking fellow and he'd got handsome again, just as I said, like an apple tree that suddenly blossoms in October.

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And when he spoke, it was harder still to believe that he was Homer Dilworth.

He looked at me and sort of grinned and said, "Well, Jim, I guess you thought I was the last person in the world you'd ever find in a fix like this." I saw that he had a kind of manliness about him he'd never had even in the days before he married Etta, because then he was always kind of soft and good.

He told me to sit down on his cot. He didn't seem to be discouraged. He just said, "I did it, Jim. I didn't mean to do it, but I did it. They can do with me whatever they like."

The funny thing was that he didn't seem to care.

He told me he'd sent for me because I was the only one he knew who'd understand. It wasn't any good sending for church people because they'd just lecture him and pray over him, and he didn't want to see Etta, even if she would have come.

She never did come and she wouldn't let any of the children come to see him. And in the two years since he'd run away with Frieda they'd had to go from place to place, so they'd never stopped anywhere long enough to make friends. In the end he went back 30 years, to that last afternoon we'd gone swimming together, and sent for me.

He told me all the story of what happened to him at La Vallette up to the time he ran off with Frieda, and then he told me what happened afterwards — how they were followed from town to town by newspapermen, and then how they'd always get found out and be forced to move on. He said they'd been to 27 little towns in two years.

He had the money he'd drawn out of the bank, and when that gave out he worked, sometimes as dishwasher, sometimes as farmhand, doing anything he could find to do. And he was happy all the time because Frieda was easy-going and good-natured.

He spoke about her as if she wasn't dead at all. Sometimes he was jealous of her, and once or twice they'd quarreled when she spoke to a man younger than himself.

It seemed he was frightened of younger men. He knew that he was getting old and that some day he'd lose her to a younger man because she was still young. It got to be a kind of obsession with him.

And finally they came to that little town in Missouri, and nobody found them out. He had a job checking off grain bags and hogs at the river landing and it looked as if they were going to be safe and happy at last, because there weren't even any men in the place more vigorous than himself.

They had a little house and were furnishing it from a furniture catalogue. And then one day he came home when she was out and found a letter addressed to "Miss Frieda Hemyers care of Mrs. John Slade," which was the name they were living under.

It was postmarked "Appleton,

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Wisconsin," and when he asked her about it she said it was from the boy who'd wrestled the baggage at the hotel in La Vallette, the same one he'd seen with her among the dunes. Later, when he asked her what was in it, she said she'd burned it and told him there was nothing in it — the fellow only wanted to know how she was.

But the thing stuck in Homer's brain. It wasn't, he said, that he was jealous. He had a kind of funny affection for the boy, even though he'd never spoken to him.

He kind of felt that Frieda really belonged to the boy if he wanted her. It was all mixed up in his head and he kept trying to think it out.

And then one day the river boat was a day late and he went back to the house an hour or two after he'd left it. He opened the back door but there wasn't anybody in and when he called Frieda's name she didn't answer, so he went to their bedroom and found the door was locked, and all at once he knew what had happened.

For a moment he just stood still, feeling that he was going to die. He turned cold all over, and then for a moment he couldn't see. It seemed to him that it was the end of everything, because he'd got to feel that all his life that went before was nothing at all and that he'd been alive only since he ran off with Frieda.

In his brain the thought was born that the only thing to do was to finish it then and there, and to finish it, he'd have to kill Frieda and the man who was in there with her, and then himself.

The funny thing was how clearly he remembered it all, because he was certainly insane at that moment. He took a chair and smashed down the door, and then, with a revolver, he just fired blindly into the dark room until the revolver clicked empty. And when he tried to shoot himself there wasn't any bullet left.

It was an awful moment when he stood there in the doorway. The emptiness of the pistol seemed to bring him to himself, and suddenly, because he was really a good man, he wanted to save them both.

But it was too late. Frieda was unconscious and dying, and the man was dead.

It was only then that he discovered it was the boy who had wrestled the baggage at La Vallette. He'd come all the way to Missouri to find her and run off with her.

It made him sick, and the funny thing was that the remorse he felt wasn't so great because he'd killed two people, but because the two people were Frieda and the boy. If he'd known that Frieda had the boy with her, he'd have gone away quietly and left them together forever.

They were young and love belonged to them. He was old and finished, and he was left alive. And it was terrible, too, that he'd killed the two people who had set him free. They were the two who had given him life and he'd killed them. For a moment he said he had a horrible

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feeling that instead of killing the boy, he shot himself as he was 30 years before.

After a long time he got up and laid the two bodies on the bed and covered them with a sheet, and then went into the kitchen and put his head into the oven of the stove and turned on the gas. One of the neighbors who ran in to borrow some eggs from Frieda found him there.

He wasn't dead yet. They dragged him out and brought him to and then found the bodies.

I stayed with him up to the end.

He didn't make the least effort to save himself. If Frieda had been his wife they'd have let him off maybe with manslaughter, but of course, all their story came out at the trial and he didn't have a chance.

But Homer didn't give them any satisfaction. He was sorry he'd killed Frieda and the boy, but he wasn't repentant about anything else, and he was glad of the two years of happiness he'd had with Frieda. He just sort of smiled when the judge sentenced him.

I took his body back to Hanover and buried it alongside my grandfather, because Etta wouldn't have anything to do with it. In Hanover, he became a great Example. The wages of sin is death, they said, but they never said anything about the wages of the way Homer was brought up, or the wages of living with Etta.

Last week Martha and I drove out to Ontario to see about buying our winter apples and before I thought about it we were passing the old Sammis house. The roof had fallen in and it was almost hid by bushes, and the pasture where Homer and I had lain in the sun was muddy and frozen. The cattle stood with their heads together and their tails towards the November wind.

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THE EXPLOITS OF GERVASE FEN

LOOKING FOR A DIAMOND

by EDMUND CRISPIN

GERVASE FEN, PROFESSOR OF English Language and Literature in the University of Oxford, found Ann Cargill waiting for him in his rooms in college when he returned there from a quiet dinner at the George. She was a quiet, good-looking girl, the pleasantest if not the brightest of the few undergraduates to whom he gave private tutoring.

"Nice to see you back," he said. For he knew that Ann's father had recently died and that she had been given leave of absence for the first few weeks of term in order to cope with that situation and its aftermath.

"It's not about work, I'm afraid," she confessed. "Not altogether, I mean. I — I was wondering if you could help me in something — something personal."

"Surely your moral tutor —" Fen began, and then suddenly remembered who Ann's moral tutor was. "No," he said. "No, of course not. Wait while I get some drinks, and then you can tell me all about it."

"I'm probably being several sorts of fool," said Ann as soon as they were settled with glasses in their hands. "But here goes, anyway. . . . I don't know if you know anything about my family, but my mother died years ago, I'm an only child, and my father — well, the important thing about him, for the moment, is that he had a passion for jewels.

"Jewels weren't his business. They were his hobby. And two or three months ago he sunk an enormous amount of money — about three-quarters of his capital, I should think — into buying a single diamond that he'd set his heart on, a huge thing, quite flawless.

"Well now, at the beginning of this year Daddy shut up our house at Abingdon — I live on my own in the vacs, you see, in a flat in Town: he liked me to do that — and flew out to Australia on business. He didn't take the diamond with him. It was left in the house —"

Fen lifted his eyebrows.

"Ah, yes, but the point is, it was really quite as safe there as it would have been in the bank. At the time he started collecting jewels, Daddy had his study made as near burglar-proof as money could buy; and there was only one set of keys to the door and the safe; and when he went to Australia he left those with Mr. Spottiswoode, his solicitor."

Ann took a deep breath. "And then he — he was killed. In a street accident in Sydney . . . I — I went

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down to Abingdon after the wire came, and wandered about there a bit. Remembering. That was when I saw Mr. Spottiswoode, the solicitor, driving away from the house.

"I don't think he saw me. I called after him, but he didn't stop. And of course, being Daddy's executor, he had a perfect right to be there. But I always hated Mr. Spottiswoode. . . ."

Ann wriggled in her chair. "And I'm pretty sure," she added, "that he was a crook."

After a brief pause: "I've no proof of that," she went on. "And you don't have to believe it if you don't want to. I only mentioned it because it's one of the reasons why I've come to you. Mr. Spottiswoode —"

"You say he 'was' a crook."

"Yes, that's the next thing. Mr. Spottiswoode's dead. He died three weeks ago, very soon after I saw him at Abingdon — quite suddenly, of a heart attack. And at that stage he hadn't yet got what they call a grant of probate of Daddy's will.

"So that what's happened since is that my Uncle Harry, who's now my legal guardian, has been made administrator of the estate on my behalf. In other words, Mr. Spottiswoode *did* have the only set of keys to Daddy's study, and Uncle Harry has them *now*."

Fen watched Ann's lips tremble, then he asked softly: "And is Uncle Harry a crook too?"

Ann wriggled some more. "I know it must sound as if I've got some hellish neurosis, a persecution mania or something, but — well, yes, frankly, I think he is! Only not the same kind as Mr. Spottiswoode. Uncle Harry's the rather nice, inefficient, sentimental sort of crook who always gets caught sooner or later."

"In which case we must hope that it's he who has stolen your father's diamond, and not Mr. Spottiswoode," said Fen briskly. "I take it the theft is what you have in mind."

"It's crazy, I know, and we shall probably find the diamond in the safe just where Daddy put it. But look, Professor Fen: Uncle Harry's meeting me at the house tomorrow morning to unlock the study and — and to go through its contents. He's been in America up to two days ago, so there hasn't been a chance before. If I could just have someone *with* me. . . ."

Gervase Fen nodded. "I'll come," he said. For he had known Ann Cargill long enough to be aware that, however erratic her views on Beowulf or Dryden, she was nobody's fool.

Uncle Harry proved to be a big, florid, amiable man dressed in checks with a black arm-band. And like his niece, he appeared at the Abingdon house next morning with a companion.

"Humbleby!" said Fen, pleased.

"Well, well," said Inspector Humbleby of Scotland Yard as he shook Fen's hand. "And what are you doing here?"

"Looking for a diamond," said Fen. "Miss Cargill is a pupil of mine. Ann, meet the Inspector."

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"We're all looking for a diamond," said Uncle Harry. "And from what the Inspector told me yesterday, there's a damn good chance we shan't find one."

"Twenty thousand pounds," said Humbleby, "is about what the average high-class fence would give for a diamond like your father's, Miss Cargill. And twenty thousand pounds is exactly what Mr. Spottiswoode's executors found hidden in his house after his death. Being honest men, they came and had a word with us about it at the Yard. We've been working on the case for a fortnight now, and we still don't know where that money came from. Nothing legitimate, you can be sure. . . .

"But there was never any secret about your father's buying that jewel; and his death was reported in the papers; and his name was on the list of Mr. Spottiswoode's clients. So of course we started putting two and two together, and yesterday I had a word with your Uncle about it, and he very kindly invited me down here, subject to your having no objection —"

"Of course not," said Ann.

"So that now," Humbleby concluded, "we shall see what we shall see."

A woman, Ann explained, had been coming in once or twice a week to keep the house dusted, but her ministrations had not, of course, included the study, which would undoubtedly be in a mess. And so it turned out. When Uncle Harry had manipulated the elaborate locks, thrown the study door open and switched on the lights (for the room was in darkness, thanks to the solid steel shutters on the windows), they saw that dust — five weeks' dust — lay undisturbed on the furniture, the bare polished boards of the floor — over everything.

Also it was cold in there. While Uncle Harry fumbled with the safe, Ann turned on the big electric fire and stood warming her hands in front of it. Presently Fen, who had been peering at the marks left by their feet on the dusty floor, lifted his head and sniffed.

"Is there something burning?"

They all sniffed.

"I can't smell anything," said Ann.

"Nor me," said Humbleby.

"Nor me," said Uncle Harry, pausing in his labors; and added ruefully: "But then, it's years since *I* was able to smell anything."

Fen shrugged. "My mistake," he said; though as a matter of fact it had not been a mistake, since he himself had not been able to smell anything burning, either. His eye caught Humbleby's. "Dog," he confided solemnly, "in the night-time."

Humbleby scowled. "Dog in the —"

"Eureka!" said Uncle Harry inaccurately; actually, all he had contrived to do was to get the safe door open. But a moment later he emerged from it holding a handsome jewel box. "Would this be —"

"Yes, that's it," said Ann. "Open it, please."

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And Uncle Harry opened it.

It was empty.

"It couldn't," Humbleby suggested, "be somewhere else?"

"No." Ann shook her head decisively. "I was with my father just before he left, and that was where he put it."

Uncle Harry grunted. "Anyway, there's your explanation of Spottiswoode's twenty thousand."

But Fen apparently did not agree. "No," he said. "Insufflator."

"Beg pardon?"

"Insufflator. For example, one of those rubber-bulb things barbers use for blowing powder onto your chin. And dust, as such, isn't really very hard to come by. It would take a little time, and a little care, but I'm willing to bet that given twenty-four hours you could redust this entire room."

An ugly gleam had appeared in Uncle Harry's eye. "Just what," he enunciated slowly, "are you suggesting?"

"I was suggesting a likely means for you to have used to cover up your traces after stealing the diamond. You stole it last night, I suppose, after Humbleby's account of Spottiswoode's hoard — which I should guess is probably blackmail money accumulated over a good many years — had suggested to you how you could disperse the blame. As to why Spottiswoode didn't forestall you — well, it may simply be that he didn't know of any means of disposing of such a distinctive stone."

"The man's mad," said Uncle Harry with conviction. "Now look, sir: granted I *could* have stolen the diamond and then covered my traces with all this — this insufflator rubbish, what the devil makes you think I actually *did?* Where's your evidence, man, your proof?"

"The dog in the Sherlock Holmes story, *Silver Blaze*," said Fen. "You will remember that 'the dog did nothing in the night-time.' And 'that was the curious incident.'"

"*Dog?*"

"Like this electric fire here," Fen explained. "No smell of burning, you recall, when it was first switched on. But there *ought* to have been a smell of burning, if the fire had been accumulating dust since (at the latest) Spottiswoode's death three weeks ago. Ask any housewife. Ergo, the fire had been very recently used — less than three weeks ago.

"And since you have possession of the only set of keys, I'm afraid, Mr. Cargill, that means *you*."

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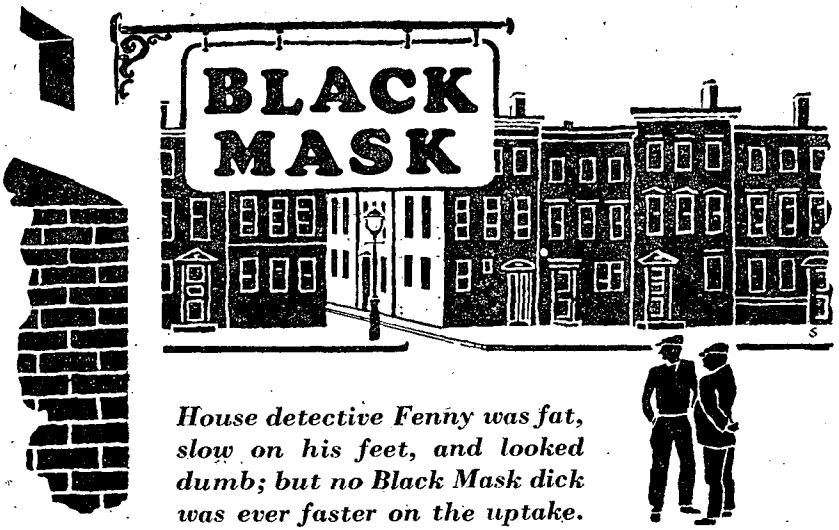

House detective Fenny was fat, slow on his feet, and looked dumb; but no Black Mask dick was ever faster on the uptake.

TWO CAN PLAY

by STEVE APRIL

THE JEWELER AND THE HOUSE dick, being exact opposites, found each other's company amusing. Mr. Alberts, the jeweler, was soft-spoken, slender, and impeccably groomed. Everything about him was expensive and polished — like his swank jewelry shop in the hotel lobby.

Mr. Fenny, the house dick, looked like a slob. His short fat body shuffled along on its big feet like a toy doll; his suit was so wrinkled he might have slept in it; and there was always about him the faint aroma of stale, cheap cigars. And because Fenny's eyes were so deeply sunk in his potato face, it was difficult to realize that they were thoughtful and alert. All he needed was a derby to look like a caricature of a house detective.

Fenny and Alberts played a little game. The dick would lumber into the shop, ask, "That three-hundred-buck watch in the window, what would it cost *me*, Mr. Alberts?" His voice was too high — strictly for laughs.

"Oh, for you it would be wholesale — two hundred and ten dollars."

A sly look would creep across

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Fenny's fat face. "Wholesale? You guys must get a five hundred per cent markup. I'll give you a hundred bucks."

"The watch cost me exactly two hundred and ten dollars, Mr. Fenny. And that doesn't include the rent and electricity, so I can display it before your eyes," Alberts would say with gentle sarcasm.

"Two hundred and ten dollars?" Fenny would repeat, as though Alberts were joking. "I'll think it over." And he would shuffle out. A few days later they would go through the same routine — over a lighter or cuff links. Fenny never bought anything, but it was a pleasant way of passing time.

Now, his great body overflowing one of the hotel manager's leather chairs, Fenny pushed his hat back on his bald head and said, "I'd go slow on arresting the guy. Looks too perfect to me. I sure liked that watch too; sorry you sold it."

Alberts said, "That's the point: Did I *sell* it, or have I been robbed of three hundred dollars?"

"Only two hundred and ten. That's what it cost you — you claim," Fenny said.

The manager, who appreciated Fenny's knack for keeping the hotel's name out of the wrong kind of headlines, said, "Now, Fenny, we don't want Mr. Alberts to lose anything. It does look suspicious, reselling the watch to a bell hop for only twenty dollars and —"

Fenny sighed. "Boss, that's it, the deal's *too* suspicious — the take is only a brace of ten spots. And why was this Rogers staying in our best room for the past eleven days on a day-to-day basis? Why wasn't he paying by the week? Okay, I'll admit he could have been waiting for a business deal to break any day. But it also gave him a chance to pay, and promptly, every-day, including a couple times by check. Then this afternoon he suddenly decides to buy the watch — and offers a check. Mr. Alberts calls the desk clerk, learns Rogers pays his bills promptly, tips well, and so he decides to take the check. Remember the time?"

"Exactly four fifteen: I recall setting the watch."

Fenny nodded. "That's what I mean — too many coincidences. Four fifteen on a Friday, no chance to call the bank till Monday, proving —"

"— That perhaps Rogers is pulling a fast one?" Alberts cut in.

"Or that we're dealing with a smart con operator," Fenny said. "Look at the case he's building against himself: half hour ago he gets loaded at the bar and sells the watch to the bellhop for twenty bucks, knowing the bellhop would show it off to the desk clerk, who'd call Alberts. And here we are. Even the drunk act is too good. If you arrest him and the check's good, he can sue you for —"

"Nevertheless, at this moment Rogers is checking out of the hotel!" Alberts said. "You don't expect me just to stand around, do you?"

"You're insured. Wait till —"

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"Till the bird has flown the coop?" Alberts asked grimly. "No, much as I dislike the fuss, I'm going directly to the police."

"Now, Mr. Alberts," the hotel manager said, "Mr. Fenny has a —"

"Okay, okay, I'll handle it," Fenny said, getting to his feet with a great effort. "But I'm still against it. Come along, both of you."

Mr. Rogers was a large man whose graying hair and handsome face gave him an air of distinction. But on his face at the moment was the loose, silly grin of a drunk. He poured a drink from the bottle on his dresser and watched a bellboy pack his bag. When the three men entered, Rogers blinked at them and asked, "Are we holding a conference here, gentlemen?"

"I understand you sold my watch for twenty dollars," Alberts began. "I —"

Trying to focus his eyes, Rogers said, "I did? Funny, thought it was *my* watch, sell it for what I please. Nobody's business but —"

Fenny pushed the jeweler aside and said, in a mild squeak, "Merely wanted to talk to you, Mr. Rogers."

Rogers waved his arm. "Busy, busy. Some other time," he said thickly.

His hand barely touched Fenny's face; but, in trying to duck, the rolypoly detective lost his balance and fell heavily to the floor. Glancing up at the manager and Alberts, both of whom were annoyed at Fenny's clumsiness, the dick said, "Help me up." Then he growled at Rogers, "Watch them hands, mister."

"Sorry," Rogers said. He tried to bow and reached out to steady himself.

Fenny took Rogers's arm. "Better come with me, chum."

As he was being steered toward the door, Rogers asked, "Where are we going? Can I take my pal along?" He motioned toward the bottle.

Fenny told him, "It's your pal, take all of it."

"Sir, you're a gentleman," Rogers mumbled and tilted the bottle.

They had reached the rear elevators when Rogers passed out. Alberts said, "Shouldn't have let him drink so much. Look at him, stupid drunk."

"Come on," Fenny said, "we'll have to carry him to the police station."

On Saturday morning Fenny called the desk sergeant and asked, "Jack, how's that Rogers joker taking jail?"

"Sleeps a lot — like a guy who's been here before."

"Beefing much?"

"Naw," the sergeant said. "Usual pitch — the food stinks, going to hire the best lawyer in town Monday — you know the routine."

"Yeah," Fenny said. "Thanks." He hung up and stuck a horrible-smelling cigar butt in his mouth.

At 9 o'clock on Monday morning Fenny stood outside the jewelry shop, watching Alberts make a telephone call. Two minutes later the

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jeweler put down the telephone, and his face turned a greenish white. Fenny opened the door as Alberts groaned, "Lord, the check is good! Have to rush down to the jail; might be time to smooth this out before —"

Alberts slapped his hat on, dodged around Fenny, sprinted through the lobby and out into the first cab waiting at the curb. Trotting behind him and blowing like a whale, Fenny managed to jump into the same cab.

Rogers was talking to a lawyer in his cell when Alberts rushed in, saying "Mr. Rogers, I've come to apologize for a terrible mistake."

"Do your talking in court, sir," the lawyer said. "My client has suffered the indignity of false arrest, plus the discomfort of two days in jail. We shall sue for damages and —"

"Jail's as good a place as any to sleep off a drunk," Fenny said, disregarding Alberts, who was tugging at his sleeve. "And your client is strictly a con man."

"We don't have to listen to your insulting language. When we sue for false arrest, you will be —"

"What false arrest?" Fenny asked softly. "Rogers must have been so sure of his act he never asked to see the blotter when he came to this morning. Evidently you haven't either — yet. When you do, you'll see the charge was made by me: assault. Rogers knocked me down when he was drunk. And I've got witnesses to prove it."

The lawyer turned to Alberts. "Didn't you sign an affidavit that my client had defrauded you?"

"I thought —" Alberts began. "I was confused; I left things up to Fenny. He knows all about police stations."

Rogers began to curse, and Fenny, who was herding Alberts out, turned and asked, "That a way to talk chum? Especially when I'm dropping the charge? You're free to scram. Just don't ever try anything at *my* hotel again."

In the cab, on the way back to the hotel, Alberts stared at the house dick with open admiration.

Fenny said wearily, "Going to be a long day. Not ten yet." He looked at the slim watch on his thick wrist.

"Why, that's the watch!"

Fenny nodded. "Gave the bellhop forty bucks for it," he said. "But no kidding, Alberts, did I really get a bargain?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILLIAM FAY**

TITLE: ***Farewell to Kennedy***

TYPE: Detective Story of the **Black Mask** human-interest type

DETECTIVE: Sergeant Joe

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The question is: Is an honest cop — even a super-cop, a Galahad-with-a-badge — entitled to one mistake?*

AFTER ALL THE WAITING AND WONdering what to do, he telephoned Kennedy at his house and told him calmly and quickly the essential thing. In this way he was not obliged to watch the other man's face, and it granted them both, as dignified men, opportunity to trim or tuck carefully away any loose emotional strings. He waited at his own end of the line until Kennedy very softly said, "All right; you know all there is to know. Come over, then. We'll talk."

"There won't be much to talk about, George. There's only one thing I can do," he said. "Do you hear me, George?"

"I hear you," Kennedy said, and Joe wondered, hearing the older man, if any event or person or thing could ever rob him of that calm authority.

"I'll be over," he said. "I'm two blocks away."

Outside the drug store he lit a cigarette. He had known of Kennedy's fall from grace since early afternoon, and, except for Kennedy, he was the only cop who did. Now in the evening, like thin ash from the pyre of a roasted angel, the knowledge seeped through every desperate barricade his conscience could erect. Only one fact was shriekingly simple: Kennedy, the incorruptible captain of detectives, like a pair of socks, had been purchased for cash on the line.

He moved slowly along the street where the Kennedys lived among the dwindling Irish on the west side of the city. It was a narrow stone house that

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never had been fancy in the Kennedys' long tenure and was a bit less fancy now. The lingering virtue of the house was spaciousness, for there had always been so many Kennedys. Joe went up the steps and pressed the bell. After a while Kennedy's wife came to the door, turning a towel in her soft, moist hands, and looking surprised to find him standing there.

"Oh — it's you?"

"You were expecting Gregory Peck?"

"I mean — the girl's got her head in the sink, Joe. I was helping her do her hair. You couldn't have warned us?"

"I didn't come to see Mary," he explained. "I came over to talk to the boss."

"Well, that's better. By the time you get through, she'll look human." Mrs. Kennedy was rather big, and in the fashion of her daughter, handsomely made. She looked as scrupulously honest as her husband, and — in her own case — was honest. "George was on the phone a few minutes ago," she said, "but I think he's gone back upstairs. You know where."

Joe kept climbing. The ancient stairs were narrow and steep but they didn't creak beneath his weight. The old house was built like a vault, or, you might say, a Kennedy.

"Hello, Joey," Kennedy said. "Come in and sit."

Kennedy sat where he always sat, under the hanging light in the littered room at the top of the house, watching him shrewdly. He sat here night after night in a mess of his own creation, making things out of wood, some big and some small, some beautiful, most of it useless. Recent effort had produced a midget wheelbarrow, a totem pole of a pencil's proportions, and a set of wooden teeth, uppers and lowers, that Kennedy said were modeled after George Washington's.

"Come in and sit down, Joey." Kennedy's tone was light, his eyes still calculating. He had never called him "Joey" before. The vowel sound was an added, deliberate touch. He wore a lopsided smile, as though larceny had already softened the starch of his personality. He's changed, Joe thought; I swear that already he has changed. "Sit down, Joey," Kennedy said again.

Joe came in, but for a while he did not sit down. Automatic obedience was not exactly what the moment required. There sat Kennedy, massive and strong, the honored, aging Kennedy of 60 years, still black-haired and youthful-looking, almost certainly unafraid in any panicky sense — and caught like a package thief. It was still hardly possible for Joe to associate the man and the act. He did not expect that he would ever understand it. He had already closed the door. He stood scratching his chest through his shirt and he said to Kennedy very flatly, "Why did you take the money?"

"I just took it," Kennedy said. "I thought I'd like to have it."

"That the way you still feel, George?"

"I don't know. It's funny, huh?"

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It was strange, Joe thought, but it wasn't funny. It was a whole life. It was a whole man down the drain. It was a wild, unnecessary end, like a man being hit full-tilt by a train for no fairer reward than the recovery of his hat.

"You mean you took it for the family, George?"

"The family, no," said Kennedy. "There was a time they needed it. But with four of them working?" The wonder and the pain were suddenly fused in what he said next: "I think I took it because I was out of my mind."

"Or because," Joe said, "well, maybe because you just didn't care any more? Like, for instance, Solly Druze's money was as good as anyone else's?"

"A little like that, Joe. You're kind of close. But it was more like all of a sudden I didn't believe in God or the United States Marines, when really I do — God especially. I feel very strange, like I should giggle and laugh, but not very loud. Anybody know it but you?"

"Just me," Joe said. "I'm the only one."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to turn you in."

"That's what I figured," Kennedy said.

"You trained me, George. I'm supposed to be your kind of a cop."

The big man gazed down at his hands. He had not yet sagged, but under the glare of the light his flesh seemed whiter, softer. It was hot in the room. In the dense hair on Kennedy's arms, and on his brow, the sweat stood shiny, separate, and clear, like beads of cooked tapioca. When he looked up again the lopsided grin was gone from his loose-hanging jaw.

Joe didn't know what to say. A bare white shade moved slowly at the window, yielding to the press of a breeze no stronger than a breath. In the quiet house a drainpipe accepted a quantity of water, sucking it down with a shrill whine: Mary's shampoo. Joe could hear her voice, rising to them from below. He looked once again at her father, sitting here in reduced yet terrible strength — watching, waiting, with the look of death two inches deep behind his gaze. This much was real, he believed. Help me, he thought, and almost spoke the words aloud.

"What was Solly to get for the cash, George?"

"Peace and contentment," Kennedy said. "A weekly card game in his apartment. A small book for a select clientele. That sort of thing. Lots of money and no commotion." Kennedy breathed deeply, ruefully. "One wrong step and I fell on my face, huh, Joe? One time in thirty years and I had to louse it up. It was as simple as you say?"

"The way I told you on the phone," Joe said. "One chance in a million. I saw Freddie Gelb give you the money. Why you didn't hear me walk into the room I still don't know. I just stood there like a dummy and you never turned around. I got hold of Freddie later and kept hitting his

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head on the jamb of his kitchen door until he told met the dough was from Solly. I didn't believe it, yet I had to."

"Well, you're a nice young fellow, Joey," Kennedy said, "and you're a better cop than me." The older man brushed wood shavings from his lap. He picked splinters from his shirt. The fingers trembled. "You hear me, Joey? I'm right?"

Joe didn't reply. He's working on me now, Joe thought. He isn't begging, but he's working, because the hope isn't dead in him yet. He's a weaker man than he was yesterday. It's in his face.

"Where'd you put the money, George?"

Kennedy pointed. "The box," he said.

The money lay in the carved and beautiful tool chest Kennedy himself had made. The bills were girded at their center like the stacks of cash you see in banks. Joe picked it up and fanned the money like a deck of cards. It was new and crisp in 100s, 50s, 20s. He dropped it back into the box among the heavy shavings and sawdust, jumbled nails, hack-saw blades, sandpaper sheets, and odd things jumbled together. Kennedy, a skilled man, had never been a tidy one. Andrew Jackson looked up at Joe from a miserable twenty. He turned away from the stern face. It was Kennedy who mattered.

"Are you sorry now, George, that you took it?"

"I wish I was dead," said Kennedy.

Joe walked away as far as the wall and wanted to punch a hole in the plaster there. He could hear Mary and her mother now, talking downstairs in their natural tones, not knowing the axe that hung over them all. A younger Kennedy ran down a flight of stairs, a routine occurrence that always sounded like a horse collapsing on a drum. Joe couldn't stand much more.

"Give the money back to Solly," he almost shouted. "Do you hear?" That was the thing, he almost persuaded himself, and Kennedy looked paler. His lips fell open.

"You'll let me give it back?" he asked.

Kennedy, Joe thought, the supercop, the Galahad-with-a-badge. He could see the hope leap now beyond those bounds of frigid dignity that Kennedy had worn like a corset all of his adult life.

"You'd do that much for me, Joe?"

"Who am I?" he demanded fiercely. "I'm to make the final judgment?"

Now Kennedy knew he had won. Even when wrong, he had won. Joe watched him rise from the chair, the planed wood falling from his hands, the light debris of his labor clinging to the top of his pants. The big hands touched him with gratitude. Kennedy's mouth, no longer firm, tried to do it with words.

"Chuck it," Joe said. "Get away. I'm wrong, I know. In your life you never gave anyone a break like this."

"Bless you," Kennedy said. "I must have been out of my mind."

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Joe looked away. The thick tongue of sentiment had always made him uneasy; coming from Kennedy, it was unendurable. "When will you give the money back, George?"

"Tonight," said Kennedy, "when you're gone. When they're asleep downstairs, I'll go to Solly, Joe. Let me do it my way."

He left Kennedy, closing the door, and descending the stairs he was half convinced that he had made a mistake. Charity and mercy were good things in their places. But was this such a place? Or himself the one to know? Yet he didn't go back. Later on he told himself it had been because Mary was waiting below. He could hear her humming some tune. The light was on in the lower hall.

"You were long enough," she said. "You manage to straighten out the troubles of the world?"

"We figured it all out, Angel. Me and your smart old man."

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"The matter? There's nothing the matter."

"For a minute you looked funny."

"I'm screaming with laughter and I don't look as funny as you," he said, "with that towel around your head."

"You dog, you," Mary said.

He kissed her on one shiny cheek. She smelled of soap. The turbaned towel became her. She was good to look at any time, but tonight it hurt. "You look like that big Hindu — that what's-'is-name that protects Orphan Annie," he said. Actually, she looked beautiful, and standing in her low-heeled mules, she was no taller than himself. She made a face. "You can't stay, Joe?"

"I've got things to do. So many things."

"Like a dope, I put on the coffee."

"I can smell it, Angel. It's a great loss to me."

"You fraud," Mary said.

But her eyes were soft, as her nature was soft. She called you the wrong kind of names with the right kind of tenderness. It was a game they had. She was big and beautiful and 26, and, Joe thought sadly, looking at her, wasting on the vine. He should have married her a year ago, he knew. Or perhaps two years ago, before he'd been made a sergeant.

"What's that?" he said.

"The fellow in the funny papers," Mary said. "Pay attention, Applehead. His name is Punjab." She stood on her toes very straight and statuesque and sizeable, exactly like the mammoth funny-paper man. When she came down off her toes, with her eyes full of him, he held her shoulders and kissed her on the mouth. He held on longer than he believed advisable.

"Good night, Punjab," he said very softly.

George Kennedy, by the coroner's estimate, had been murdered at 4:30 A.M. His body was discovered at 6:15. He had been shot and he was found face-down, concealed from passing view, in the sunken entrance to the basement of a brownstone house, not far from where he lived. It was

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agreed he had stumbled or fallen into this entrance and collapsed there, after he was shot.

Joe learned these details at approximately 9 o'clock when he arrived at the station house. Friends told him later that when he heard the news he had actually staggered and turned the strangest color they had ever seen take possession of a living man's flesh.

He sat for a while in a plain wooden chair, surrounded by other cops, who were being gentle and clumsy and nice, knowing well how things had been with him and Kennedy and all the dead man's family. Joe looked up at them. "Why didn't you phone me when it happened?" he asked.

"Don't know for sure, Joe; maybe nobody had the heart."

"I was with him last night," he heard himself say. There now, he thought, that would begin it; now with their natural questions in reasonable sequence they would draw from him what he didn't want to tell them, and what, of course, they were entitled to know. He repeated: "I was with Kennedy last night."

"We know that, Joe. Trouble was you left at half-past 9. We know that much from the kid."

"What kid?" Joe asked. He followed their glances.

"Marty helped us with details," someone explained, "up till the time the family went to sleep."

The boy, who was Kennedy's youngest, was sixteen. He looked like his father and he could grow even bigger. He wore a gym shirt with the name of his high school on its chest. His eyes met Joe and his firm mouth trembled. Trying to fight the tears, he had no place to turn, nowhere to run. He fell against Joe to hide his shame, grasping him and bawling aloud, holding tighter and tighter. It was awful. They sent the boy home. Inspector Needham came into the room. He had come up from downtown in fifteen minutes, they said, and been on the job since 7 o'clock. He was watching Joe, who wondered why.

Then Needham said kindly, "I think you're too close to this case, Sergeant. I think where you belong for the next few days is with Kennedy's family. Stay close to them and let me know if there's anything the department can do."

Joe said, "Yes, sir," aware while he spoke that it was not the right thing to say. Speak now, he told himself — *now!* But his tongue was thick and silent in his mouth. While he was fighting it, Needham walked back into the other room.

Joe put a cigarette in his mouth. A cop named Lew Farber, of Homicide, held a match for him. Farber said, "It was a great night all around." But Joe didn't comment. He was thinking. "It was the first doubleheader we ever had in Kennedy's precinct, far as I can remember," Farber said.

Joe looked at him. "I don't understand you, Lew."

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"You must know the guy, Joe. Freddie Gelb, a cheap thief. Used to run errands for Solly Druze an' people like that. Well, years ago, when Solly was active, that is. You know 'im?"

Joe didn't move. He couldn't move. But the words came out: "I know him."

"He got shot in bed in a boardin' house, maybe an hour after Kennedy got it in the street."

Joe tightened his hands to the point of pain. He succeeded in asking, "You figure maybe it was Solly, Lew?"

"Hell, no," said Farber. "There'll be a routine check, but Solly's been sweet an' orderly for seven years. Like a reformed dancer, Solly don't even twitch."

Joe stood up. "I want to see Needham."

"We don't see any connection between the two killings," Farber continued. "Freddie was vicious, but small-time."

"Excuse me," Joe said. He went into the room where Needham had gone. "The Inspector here?"

"Gone, Joe. Hermie Shultz just drove him back downtown. There anything I can do?"

"Not exactly, Lieutenant. Not just now, anyhow."

"You look weird, kid. You should do what Needham said. Bow out of this an' do everyone a favor. Hear what I say?"

Joe nodded absently, then realized: they were inviting him out, without knowing it; they were cushioning the way.

At least let the family bury Kennedy, he began to petition himself. *Don't kick the ghost while the air is full of pain. The agony would fill New York. Later, or in a few days, go to Needham. Maybe, after all, it wasn't Solly. And if it wasn't Solly, who would have to know of the money that was sticking to Kennedy's hands. Even if I'm kidding myself (and I know that I am), why must the family take the grimmest punishment?*

"Something else, Joe?"

"Nothing else, Lieutenant," he said.

He did the wrong thing then for what he hoped was a proper reason. He walked out of the station house.

Kennedy's wake was in his own house, in the old tradition, with the furniture cleared from the big square parlor at the front of the house. There he lay, with his shield on his chest, in the uniform he had not worn for twenty years, except on those dress occasions of department ritual. His gold buttons gleamed and he looked very well, having been shot at a time when his health was high. His widow sat near. She was tearless, accepting the hands of hundreds who passed by. Sometimes she smiled a little foolishly, her gaze far gone. A relative, who had been watching her from the first bad hour, told Joe he was convinced that shock and grief had nudged her two-thirds off her trolley, poor woman. "But I think she will come around all right," this relative said. It was the evening of the second day.

Joe said nothing. The flowers were

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sweet as arsenic and in their ceiling-high abundance they had sucked the life from the indoor air. Mary came over and stood next to him, their hands touching at their sides, unseen in the press of the parlor traffic.

"You all right?" Joe said.

"Warm, Joe. That's all."

There was sweat on her nose and a few loose hairs had gone astray. Absently, he blew at them, and she smiled. Then he touched the loose hairs with his hand and they were in place again. "Don't ever leave me, Joe." She whispered it, but with a fierceness that was not like Mary.

The people kept coming. The priest was there. The various societies arrived — a church sodality, his club. They entered and proceeded in single file. They paused a brief prayer's length and then moved slowly past the window, past the standing members of the family. If you were a stranger, you could still identify the Kennedys, for they were bigger than the rest. The priest called Mary. "Excuse me," she said to Joe.

In the kitchen you could get a cup of coffee or a spot of whiskey, depending on your need. Most of the cops and male relatives were there. One of Kennedy's cousins stopped telling a joke when Joe came in. The deference was unmistakable. He was Kennedy's boy, the adopted and chosen one. The role made him uncomfortable. The men stood around, smiling, but uneasy. Joe drew himself a cup of coffee from a big jug with a spigot that some fireman had provided. Joe knew how it was at a big man's wake. After all, he had been to enough of them.

"Finish your joke," he said to Kennedy's cousin.

He walked out into the small yard. It was cool and the moon lit up the other small yards and the fire escapes of structures to the south. "Is that you, Joe?" somebody said. He turned around. It was Lew Farber, of Homicide.

"They were prayin' inside," Lew said. "I was a hundred per cent in tune with them but I didn't know the words."

They talked a while about nothing much. They had a smoke. Then Joe said, hoping it sounded casual, "When they found Kennedy, Lew, was there anything on him? Money, for instance?"

"A dollar forty cents, I think. George was a family man. You ought to know that. He never had any money."

Joe took a last drag on his cigarette. "Anything else on him? After all, nobody talks to me. You'd think I was his mother and you were trying to spare me."

"There was nothing on him, Joe. Just junk. You know the way he was. Busted pencils, paper clips, wood shavings."

"Wood shavings?"

"From all that doodlin' with wood at home. He had the sloppiest pockets I ever saw on a sane man. Didn't he?"

"I won't argue, Lew. Get any breaks at all?"

"Frankly, no. Lots of guys picked

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up, Joe. Lots of tries, but no cigar."

"What about Solly Druze?"

Farber looked at him closely. "I remember you mentioned him the other day. Why Solly?"

"Just a notion. Kennedy gave him a bad time once."

"Kennedy gave many a crook a bad time, then an' now, till the day he died. Matter of fact, Solly did get called downtown for the usual shave an' a haircut, like every hoodlum, plain or fancy, in the town. But Solly hasn't been active. He don't as much as spit on the subway any more."

They went inside.

Yes, it can all dissolve and die, he thought, as far as I'm concerned. They will get Solly, if they're able, but what happens to him is less important than a quiet grave for Kennedy and honor in his house.

It was morning now. The summer dawn had taken the city. The skinny birds in wretched backyards were awake. The family were all upstairs, the widow resting under sedatives. Only a sleepy-eyed mortician and Joe maintained the quiet vigil. Just a few more hours, and then, when it was 9 o'clock, they'd carry Kennedy into the church. Maybe then it would be over?

You lie very well to yourself, his conscience said. His conscience was the most persistent, articulate companion ever to sit beside him, or to walk, and if required, to race beside him when he sought to get away. It was a contest he could not expect to win. Any fair analysis informed him he had been wrong from the beginning when he accepted Needham's kindness, not as an earned indulgence, but for a shield. He got up and walked into the kitchen. He ran cold water in the sink. He raised it in cupped hands to his face. The one thing he knew that should not prove difficult would be locating the unsuspected Solly Druze.

Solly was not in his bed or his apartment at 6 o'clock. This much the night clerk grudgingly conceded. Solly lived in Kennedy's precinct, in a Broadway hotel, in the 70s. He was a twilight creature most of the time, and unless he went to the races, slept all day.

"You haven't seen him?" Joe asked.

"I didn't say I hadn't seen him."

"Then don't be cute with me," Joe cautioned. "When was he here?"

"Ten minutes ago, maybe fifteen minutes," the night clerk said. "He came in, bought a paper, then went out." The clerk nodded towards the stacked editions on the desk.

"He went out to eat?"

"That's right. Next door he went.

"Many dear thanks," Joe said.

"No thanks at all," the night clerk said. "Thank City Hall what gave you the badge."

Solly Druze sat in the big and nearly empty cafeteria eating pineapple-cheesecake, which is not a breakfast item. On Solly's inverted calendar it was a go-to-bed goodie.

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He pushed the last bit on his fork with his little finger. He seemed pleased with the pineapple-cheesecake and not tired at all, for he blew his nose with great force in his paper napkin. He shoved his newspaper aside and got up, replacing his reading glasses with his ordinary ones. At the fountain against the wall he drank some water, swishing it in his mouth, decisively. He was a decisive fellow, Solly. He paid his check and walked outside. He went through the lobby of the adjacent hotel and into the waiting elevator there. And this was where Joe chose to join him.

"Good morning, Solly."

The elevator began to climb. It was not a rapid one, but grilled and fancy and old, rocking leisurely in its ascent. The car was lined with mirrors which at certain angles displayed more Solly Druzes than you would need to stuff a jail. Retired from sinful habit, and ostentatiously reformed (if you could believe it), Solly had once been a thief of staggering consequence. Not yet 50, he was stylish and healthy, and by reputation, brave. Carefully now he appeared to examine his beard in one of the mirrors. It had prospered through the night.

"And good morning to you, young man," said Solly finally.

The tone was forced, Joe knew. The elevator stopped and they got out together. Together they walked along the figured carpet of the long, long corridor.

"This is a pinch," Joe said. "I'm the man with the lock and key."

Solly laughed. "You'd better go home an' squeeze some of the custard out of your head. Stop botherin' me." He began to open the door of his apartment.

Joe shoved Solly and the door with calculated violence. Solly fell down on a rich throw-rug with force enough to make it slide on the polished floor. His glasses fell off. Joe walked ahead of him with a large I-am-the-boss-of-this-thing stride through all the rooms of the apartment. It was very beautiful.

"This is your office, huh?"

The office faced on Broadway and the morning light came into it big. It was all glass brick, like in a dentist's. It was as nice as you'd want.

"I wish I could live this fancy," Joe said.

Solly called him a blistering number of obscene things. The puffed and dry saliva appeared like cotton pellets in the corners of his mouth. Solly had not been forcibly kicked loose from his dignity in many years. He wore his hatred like a bright flag. Yes, Solly could kill a man, Joe thought; with hate this high it would hurt him no more than to swallow an orange pit.

"Did Kennedy bounce you around, too, Solly?" Joe asked quietly. "After he gave you the money back, that is."

The words hit Solly like a flat plank in the face. There was no mistaking the shock. In Joe's own head the notion cracked like a knuckle: *Freddie Gelb never told him I knew. Freddie didn't dare tell Solly, and in due time,*

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as insurance, Freddie would have attempted to get me.

"Freddie Gelb never told you I saw him give Kennedy the money? Don't stare at me, Solly. These things get complicated and require attention. There's always another patch of dust that you have to sweep under the rug. Like, for instance, here."

Joe knelt on the deep pile of the broadloom carpeting. It was the color known in decorating shops as "greige." Solly watched him, blinking, but, evidently, could see nothing.

"Put on your reading glasses, Solly."

"What is that?"

"It sure isn't dandruff, Solly," Joe said. "Never mind what it is. You should have told the lady to vacuum the rug a couple of times, at least."

"You're talkin' mumbo-jumbo," Solly said. "You're makin' it up." The cotton puffs were bigger in the corners of his mouth.

"Relax, Solly," Joe said. "I've known since Tuesday, and yet the cops gave you no more than a routine check. You'd be clear as Kennedy's own wife — except for me."

Solly stepped back, his tongue rinning over dry lips. "Tell me more."

"Well, that's as far as I go with the things I know about. I figure Kennedy not only gave you back the dough, but let you know he was turning you in, and maybe himself as well. My guess is that Freddie killed Kennedy for you, because it was neat, out-of-doors, and it required better eyesight than you've got yourself. Shooting Freddie in his own bed was closer to your talents. You figured you wrapped up the package tight. You just didn't know about me."

"I know about you now," Solly said. He spoke very softly. His breathing, deep in his chest, seemed louder than his speech. "How much do you want?"

"I'll be expensive, Solly, but I won't be like Kennedy. I won't come marching back with it. Ten won't buy me. But it could be a nice down payment."

"Don't boss me," Solly shouted. "Don't be so big. You'll take what you get. If you've kept your mouth shut this long, you can't afford to talk much now."

Joe reached for him and caught the lapels of his coat. He lifted Solly and pulled him over the top of the desk, turning him like a sack of grain. "Talk to me like that and I'll jump on your face." He held him very close. "Get the money now," he directed, then let Solly go.

It was that way. It took time, while they appraised one another. There was no more to be said. After a while Solly shrugged. He opened a bottom drawer in his desk, turning the key. He tried to smile for the sake of prestige, but the smile was sick and flat on his face. He tossed a packet of money disdainfully on the desk.

"Here's the ten," he said. "Go buy a cigar."

20s, 50s, 100s. Joe picked it up, as he had a few nights before at Kennedy's. He fanned through the crisp green notes.

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"Look, Solly, look. This isn't dandruff, either. These are wood fragments you didn't see or didn't bother to get rid of. They'll check in the lab with shavings and grindings they found in Kennedy's pockets."

"You've got the dough," Solly said. "So what?"

"I don't want it the way you thought I wanted it. Now's the hard part, Solly, for you, for me, and the Kennedys. George was at least a part-time crook, you're a full-time one, and me? I don't know what I am." But he was certainly not happy. "Let's go peacefully," he said.

Solly Druze did not go peacefully. In a foaming rage he threw a punch that missed. He crippled his hand against the desk. Joe punched him competently in the mouth and knocked him over the swivel chair. Joe walked around after him and Solly screamed like a woman. Solly reached for the drawer where the money had been but was inept and fumbling with frantic haste. Joe saw the revolver in Solly's hand and shot him twice. It was the first time he had killed a man. The powder smell hung heavy. The silence was deep. Joe turned away from the body. He picked up the telephone.

They gave Kennedy an "Inspector's funeral" in the big church east of Broadway. They cut off traffic on the one-way street and you could see the cops in dress parade, their white gloves swinging in the sunlight, pretty as a squad of scrubbed cadets.

Joe was late getting there because you can't drop a body like a shoe. The business downtown had taken time, and when he reached the church's vestibule, they were carrying Kennedy out. The widow walked with her oldest boy. Even the professional morticians wore a veil of pallid gloom. Mary came next, alone, her eyes meeting his and asking him, "Why couldn't you have been here?" Joe chewed his lip. She didn't know where he had been. He moved closer to Lew Farber, who was standing to one side. The money, flat and tidy and concealed within his coat, felt bulky as a phone book when he breathed.

"We got the word from down below," Lew said. "Needham says you're a Kennedy kind of a cop. You were right, huh? It was Solly all along?"

"Call it a hunch, Lew. Call it anything. He admitted it before he went for the gun."

"What could have been between them?" Farber said.

Joe answered slowly. "I don't pretend to know." The big church emptied fast. Out in the bright street where the cops stood grandly at attention, the rented limousines pulled slowly from the curb. "Well, it's done," Joe said, then looked at his friend. "Ever occur to you, Lew, that maybe Kennedy was on Solly's payroll?"

"If I didn't know you were kiddin'," Lew said, "I would punch you in the mouth."

Joe walked alone in the vast and

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quiet church. Far ahead, on the high front altar, the sexton was killing the candlelight. The bright flames just surrendered and went out, like murdered memories. It will be safe now, Joe thought carefully; I think the story will hold.

He paused at one side of the darkened church and he had the money in his hand. The mouth of the poor box was capacious as the inside of a hat. The money fell and thudded mildly against the quarters, the nickels, the dimes. God make it right, Joe prayed, then quickly walked away. Outside the last of Kennedy's cortege had passed from view, and the cops, in exquisite order, marched away.

WINNERS IN "MERLINI AND THE LIE DETECTOR" CONTEST

WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE ($100)

Ruth Tarson
New York, N. Y.

WINNERS OF ADDITIONAL PRIZES ($5.00 EACH)

Walter N. Allen, Baltimore, Md.; Mrs. Eugenie Bagley, New York, N. Y.; Mrs. John W. Baldwin, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Robert R. Berneike, M.D., New Haven, Conn.; Everett F. Bleiler, Holliston, Mass.; John T. Breitwieser, Weston, Conn.; Mrs. Carol T. Cover, Fairfax, Va.; Herbert J. Erlanger, New York, N. Y.; Maynard Gold, Island Park, N. Y.; Irving Goldstone, Newark, N. J.; John F. Haskins, New York, N. Y.; I. R. Hirschler, Kansas City, Mo.; Edward Hudson, New York, N. Y.; Mrs. Eleanor C. Maloney, Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Fred W. Maloy, Eureka, Calif.; Mrs. M. H. McRight, Tuscumbia, Ala.; James B. O'Sullivan, Clondalkin, Ireland; Robert F. Phillips, Falls Church, Va.; John A. Ridlon, South Duxbury, Mass.; Mrs. William S. Seward, Caracas, Venezuela; Francis J. Sheehan, Syracuse, N. Y.; Harry Sivia, Palestine, Texas; Malcolm Smith, Putney, Vt.; Maurie N. Taylor, McHenry, Ill.; Mrs. Patrick C. Tims, Chicago, Ill.; Mrs. W. Tombs, Neptune, N. J.; Leonard D. Weil, Stony Creek, Conn.; Mrs. Naomi Wells, Highlands, N. J.; Dorothy J. Westgate, Oak Park, Ill.; W. Foster Willett, Woodmere, N. Y.

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More about Jack London — from Irving Stone's excellent biography, SAILOR ON HORSEBACK (*Houghton Mifflin, 1938*): *"He was afraid of nothing; the greater the risk, the greater the fun. Was he not a Viking who had crossed San Francisco Bay in an open skiff in a howling southwester? . . . He was endowed with the characteristics that go to make up the genius of the Irish: compassion for the sufferings of others; liberality with their own possessions; the love of a fight . . . and the courage to plow in with both fists flying."*

Is it any wonder that Jack London was so preoccupied with the superman theme? He was close to a superman himself . . . And now we bring you the seventh in our series of detective, crime, and mystery stories by Jack London. This too might be called the tale of a superman — a primitive superman who lived long ago "on the rim of the polar sea." It is also the tale of headcraft, as distinguished from witchcraft — a puzzle story in the great tradition and one of Jack London's most ingenious mysteries.

THE MYSTERY OF KEESH

by JACK LONDON

KEESH LIVED LONG AGO ON THE rim of the polar sea, was headman of his village through many and prosperous years, and died full of honors with his name on the lips of men. So long ago did he live that only the old men remember his name, his name and the tale, which they got from the old men before them, and which the old men to come will tell to their children and their children's children down to the end of time. And the winter darkness, when the north gales make their long sweep across the ice-pack and the air is filled with flying white and no man may venture forth, is the chosen time for the telling of how Keesh, from the poorest igloo in the village, rose to power and place over them all.

He was a bright boy, so the tale runs, healthy and strong, and he had seen thirteen suns, in their way of reckoning time. For each winter the sun leaves the land in darkness, and the next year a new sun returns so that they may be warm again and look upon one another's faces. The father of Keesh had been a very brave man, but he had met his death in a time of famine, when he sought to save the lives of his people by taking the life of a great polar bear. In his eagerness he came to close grapples

Originally titled, "The Story of Keesh," from LOVE OF LIFE AND OTHER STORIES; *copyright, 1907, by The Macmillan Company, renewed*

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with the bear, and his bones were crushed; but the bear had much meat on him and the people were saved. Keesh was his only son, and after that Keesh lived alone with his mother. But the people are prone to forget, and they forgot the deed of his father; and he being but a boy and his mother only a woman, they too were swiftly forgotten, and before long came to live in the meanest of all the igloos.

It was at a council one night in the big igloo of Klosh-Kwan, the chief, that Keesh showed the blood that ran in his veins and the manhood that stiffened his back. With the dignity of an elder, he rose to his feet, and waited for silence amid the babble of voices.

"It is true that meat be apportioned me and mine," he said. "But it is oft-times old and tough, this meat, and moreover it has an unusual quantity of bones."

The hunters, grizzled and gray, and lusty and young, were aghast. The like had never been known before. A child, that talked like a grown man and said harsh things to their very faces!

But steadily and with seriousness, Keesh went on. "For that I know my father, Bok, was a great hunter, I speak these words. It is said that Bok brought home more meat than any of the two best hunters, that with his own hands he attended to the division of it, that with his own eyes he saw to it that the least old woman and the last old man received fair share."

"Na! Na!" the men cried. "Put the child out!" "Send him off to bed!" "He is no man that he should talk to men and graybeards!"

He waited calmly till the uproar died down.

"Thou hast a wife, Ugh-Gluk," he said, "and for her dost thou speak. And thou, too, Massuk, a mother also, and for them dost thou speak. My mother has no one, save me; wherefore I speak. As I say, though Bok be dead because he hunted over-keenly, it is just that I, who am his son, and that Ikeega, who is my mother and was his wife, should have meat in plenty so long as there be meat in plenty in the tribe. I, Keesh, the son of Bok, have spoken."

He sat down, his ears keenly alert to the flood of protest and indignation his words had created.

"That a boy should speak in council!" old Ugh-Gluk was mumbling.

"Shall the babes in arms tell us men the things we shall do?" Massuk demanded in a loud voice. "Am I a man that I should be made a mock by every child that cries for meat?"

The anger boiled a white heat. They ordered him to bed, threatened that he should have no meat at all, and promised him sore beatings for his presumption. Keesh's eyes began to flash, and the blood to pound darkly under his skin. In the midst of the abuse he sprang to his feet.

"Hear me, ye men!" he cried. "Never shall I speak in the council again, never again till the men come to me and say, 'It is well, Keesh, that thou shouldst speak, it is well and it is

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our wish.' Take this now, ye men, for my last word. Bok, my father, was a great hunter. I, too, his son, shall go and hunt the meat that I eat. And be it known, now, that the division of that which I kill shall be fair. And no widow nor weak one shall cry in the night because there is no meat, when the strong men are groaning in great pain for that they have eaten overmuch. And in the days to come there shall be shame upon the strong men who have eaten overmuch. I, Keesh, have said it!"

Jeers and scornful laughter followed him out of the igloo, but his jaw was set and he went his way, looking neither to right nor left.

The next day he went forth along the shoreline where the ice and the land met together. Those who saw him go noted that he carried his bow, with a goodly supply of bone-barbed arrows, and that across his shoulder was his father's big hunting spear. And there was laughter, and much talk, at the event. It was an unprecedented occurrence. Never did boys of his tender age go forth to hunt, much less to hunt alone. Also were there shaking of heads and prophetic mutterings, and the women looked pityingly at Ikeega, and her face was grave and sad.

"He will be back ere long," they said cheeringly.

"Let him go; it will teach him a lesson," the hunters said. "And he will come back shortly, and he will be meek and soft of speech in the days to follow."

But a day passed, and a second, and on the third a wild gale blew, and there was no Keesh. Ikeega tore her hair and put soot of the seal-oil on her face in token of her grief; and the women assailed the men with bitter words in that they had mistreated the boy and sent him to his death; and the men made no answer, preparing to go in search of the body when the storm abated.

Early next morning, however, Keesh strode into the village. But he came not shamefacedly. Across his shoulders he bore a burden of fresh-killed meat. And there was importance in his step and arrogance in his speech.

"Go, ye men, with the dogs and sledges, and take my trail for the better part of a day's travel," he said. "There is much meat on the ice — a she-bear and two half-grown cubs."

Ikeega was overcome with joy, but he received her demonstrations in manlike fashion, saying: "Come, Ikeega, let us eat. And after that I shall sleep, for I am weary."

And he passed into their igloo and ate profoundly, and after that slept for twenty running hours.

There was much doubt at first, much doubt and discussion. The killing of a polar bear is very dangerous, but thrice dangerous is it, and three times thrice, to kill a mother bear with her cubs. The men could not bring themselves to believe that the boy Keesh, single-handed, had accomplished so great a marvel. But the women spoke of the fresh-killed meat he had brought on his back, and this

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was an overwhelming argument against their unbelief. So they finally departed, grumbling greatly that in all probability, if the thing were so, he had neglected to cut up the carcasses. Now in the north it is very necessary that this should be done as soon as a kill is made. If not, the meat freezes so solidly as to turn the edge of the sharpest knife, and a 300-pound bear, frozen stiff, is no easy thing to put upon a sled and haul over the rough ice. But arrived at the spot, they found not only the kill, which they had doubted, but that Keesh had quartered the beasts in true hunter fashion, and removed the entrails.

Thus began the mystery of Keesh, a mystery that deepened and deepened with the passing of the days. His very next trip he killed a young bear, nearly full-grown, and on the trip following, a large male bear and his mate. He was ordinarily gone from three to four days, though it was nothing unusual for him to stay away a week at a time on the ice field. Always he declined company on these expeditions, and the people marveled. "How does he do it?" they demanded of one another. "Never does he take a dog with him, and dogs are of such great help, too."

"Why dost thou hunt only bear?" Klosh-Kwan once ventured to ask him.

And Keesh made fitting answer. "It is well known that there is more meat on the bear," he said.

But there was also talk of witchcraft in the village. "He hunts with evil spirits," some of the people contended, "wherefore his hunting is rewarded. How else can it be, save that he hunts with evil spirits?"

"Mayhap they be not evil, but good, these spirits," others said. "It is known that his father was a mighty hunter. May not his father hunt with him so that he may attain excellence and patience and understanding? Who knows?"

Nonetheless his success continued, and the less skillful hunters were often kept busy hauling in his meat. And in the division of it he was just. As his father had done before him, he saw to it that the least old woman and the last old man received a fair portion, keeping no more for himself than his needs required. And because of this, and of his merit as a hunter, he was looked upon with respect, and even awe; and there was talk of making him chief after old Klosh-Kwan. Because of the things he had done, they looked for him to appear again in the council, but he never came, and they were ashamed to ask.

"I am minded to build me an igloo," he said one day to Klosh-Kwan and a number of the hunters. "It shall be a large igloo, wherein Ikeega and I can dwell in comfort."

"Ay," they nodded gravely.

"But I have no time. My business is hunting, and it takes all my time. So it is but just that the men and women of the village who eat my meat should build me my igloo."

And the igloo was built accordingly, on a generous scale which exceeded

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even the dwelling of Klosh-Kwan. Keesh and his mother moved into it, and it was the first prosperity she had enjoyed since the death of Bok. Nor was material prosperity alone hers, for, because of her wonderful son and the position he had given her, she came to be looked upon as the first woman in all the village; and the women were given to visiting her, to asking her advice, and to quoting her wisdom when arguments arose among themselves or with the men.

But it was the mystery of Keesh's marvelous hunting that took chief place in all their minds. And one day Ugh-Gluk taxed him with witchcraft to his face.

"It is charged," Ugh-Gluk said ominously, "that thou dealest with evil spirits, wherefore thy hunting is rewarded."

"Is not the meat good?" Keesh made answer. "Has one in the village yet to fall sick from the eating of it? How dost thou know that witchcraft be concerned? Or dost thou guess, in the dark, merely because of the envy that consumes thee?"

And Ugh-Gluk withdrew discomfited, the women laughing at him as he walked away. But in the council one night, after long deliberation, it was determined to put spies on his track when he went forth to hunt, so that his methods might be learned. So on his next trip, Bim and Bawn, two young men, and the craftiest of hunters, followed after him, taking care not to be seen. After five days they returned, their eyes bulging and their tongues a-tremble to tell what they had seen. The council was hastily called in Klosh-Kwan's dwelling, and Bim took up the tale.

"Brothers! As commanded, we journeyed on the trail of Keesh, and cunningly we journeyed, so that he might not know. And midway of the first day he picked up with a great he-bear. It was a very great bear."

"None greater," Bawn corroborated, and went on himself. "Yet was the bear not inclined to fight, for he turned away and made off slowly over the ice. This we saw from the rocks of the shore, and the bear came toward us, and after him came Keesh, very much unafraid. And he shouted harsh words after the bear, and waved his arms about, and made much noise. Then did the bear grow angry, and rise up on his hind legs, and growl. But Keesh walked right up to the bear."

"Ay," Bim continued the story. "Right up to the bear Keesh walked. And the bear took after him, and Keesh ran away. But as he ran he dropped a little round ball on the ice. And the bear stopped and smelled of it, then swallowed it up. And Keesh continued to run away and drop little round balls, and the bear continued to swallow them up."

Exclamations and cries of doubt were being made, and Ugh-Gluk expressed open unbelief.

"With our own eyes we saw it," Bim affirmed.

And Bawn — "Ay, with our own eyes. And this continued until the

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bear stood suddenly upright and cried aloud in pain, and thrashed his fore paws madly about. And Keesh continued to make off over the ice to a safe distance. But the bear gave him no notice, being occupied with the misfortune the little round balls had wrought within him."

"Ay, within him," Bim interrupted. "For he did claw at himself, and leap about over the ice like a playful puppy, save from the way he growled and squealed it was plain it was not play but pain. Never did I see such a sight!"

"Nay, never was such a sight seen," Bawn took up the strain. "And, furthermore, it was such a large bear."

"Witchcraft," Ugh-Gluk suggested.

"I know not," Bawn replied. "I tell only of what my eyes beheld. And after a while the bear grew weak and tired, for he was very heavy and he had jumped about with exceeding violence, and he went off along the shore ice, shaking his head slowly from side to side and sitting down ever and again to squeal and cry. And Keesh followed after the bear, and we followed after Keesh, and for that day and three days more we followed. The bear grew weak, and never ceased crying from his pain."

"It was a charm!" Ugh-Gluk exclaimed. "Surely it was a charm!"

"It may well be."

And Bim relieved Bawn. "The bear wandered, now this way and now that, doubling back and forth and crossing his trail in circles, so that at the end he was near where Keesh had first come upon him. By this time he was quite sick, the bear, and could crawl no farther, so Keesh came up close and speared him to death."

"And then?" Klosh-Kwan demanded.

"Then we left Keesh skinning the bear, and came running that the news of the killing might be told."

And in the afternoon of that day the women hauled in the meat of the bear while the men sat in council assembled. When Keesh arrived a messenger was sent to him, bidding him come to the council. But he sent reply, saying that he was hungry and tired; also that his igloo was large and comfortable and could hold many men.

And curiosity was so strong on the men that the whole council, Klosh-Kwan to the fore, rose up and went to the igloo of Keesh. He was eating, but he received them with respect and seated them according to their rank. Ikeega was proud and embarrassed by turns, but Keesh was quite composed.

Klosh-Kwan recited the information brought by Bim and Bawn, and at its close said in a stern voice: "So explanation is wanted, O Keesh, of thy manner of hunting. Is there witchcraft in it?"

Keesh looked up and smiled. "Nay, O Klosh-Kwan. It is not for a boy to know aught of witches, and of witches I know nothing. I have but devised a means whereby I may kill the ice-bear with ease, that is all. It be headcraft, not witchcraft."

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"And may any man?"

"Any man."

There was a long silence. The men looked in one another's faces, and Keesh went on eating.

"And . . . and . . . and wilt thou tell us, O Keesh?" Klosh-Kwan finally asked in a tremulous voice.

"Yeah, I will tell thee." Keesh finished sucking a marrow-bone and rose to his feet. "It is quite simple. Behold!"

EDITORS' QUERY: *How did Keesh cut his ice-bears down to size? What was the secret of his hunting method? The clues are all in Jack London's story, either given or implicit in the background.*

Keesh picked up a thin strip of whalebone and showed it to them. The ends were sharp as needle-points. The strip he coiled carefully, till it disappeared in his hand. Then, suddenly releasing it, it sprang straight again. He picked up a piece of blubber.

"So," he said, "one takes a small chunk of blubber, thus, and thus makes it hollow. Then into the hollow goes the whalebone, so, tightly coiled, and another piece of blubber is fitted over the whalebone. After that it is put outside where it freezes into a little round ball. The bear swallows the little round ball, the blubber melts, the whalebone with its sharp ends stands out straight, the bear gets sick, and when the bear is very sick, why, you kill him with a spear. It is quite simple."

And Ugh-Gluk said "Oh!" and Klosh-Kwan said "Ah!" And each said something after his own manner, and all understood.

And this is the story of Keesh, who lived long ago on the rim of the polar sea. Because he exercised headcraft and not witchcraft, he rose from the meanest igloo to be headman of his village, and through all the years that he lived, it is related, his tribe was prosperous, and neither widow nor weak one cried aloud in the night because there was no meat.

A Curious Attempt on Napoleon's Life

The attempt to poison Bonaparte with a pinch of Snuff is one of the meanest attacks on him we have yet heard of. Bonaparte is not a man to be taken by the nose! To blow him with gun-powder is fair enough but to pinch him to death is the Vilest Bathos!

American Citizen and General Advertiser, September 30, 1801.

(Contributed by Rita Gotesman)

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Another $250 in Cash Prizes

Here is the second in our new series of reader-participation Prize Contests. Again we bring you an unfinished mystery by Clayton Rawson, featuring his magician-detective, the Great Merlini. For the benefit of those who may not have seen or read the first of this series, let us recapitulate the rules: at the big moment in Mr. Rawson's story — when the Great Merlini has indicated he knows the answer and is toying with his adversary — we halt the tale and give you the opportunity to figure out the solution for yourself. But this need not be mere academic ratiocination: if you wish — and we cordially invite you to do so — you may write out your answer, on typewriter or in longhand, and submit it for a cash prize. . . . For the best solution — in, say, 50-to-100 words — we offer a First Prize of $100, and for the 30 next best solutions, prizes of $5 each; in case of ties, duplicate prizes will of course be awarded.

The judges are the members of EQMM's editorial staff, and it is agreed that their decisions are final. While we guarantee that every contestant has an equal chance to win and that every submission will be given personal consideration by the judges, we cannot undertake to return any of the entries. The awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is (1) on the accuracy of your solution, and (2) on the simplicity, clarity, and soundness of your answer to the question at the end of Mr. Rawson's unfinished story.

In order to announce the names of the winners as soon as possible, your answers must reach Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York, no later than October 21, 1955. This will permit us to publish the names of the winners in our January 1956 issue (on sale early in December 1955).

Now, join the Great Merlini . . . and the best of luck to you all!

MERLINI AND THE VANISHED DIAMONDS

by CLAYTON RAWSON

THE BLACK POLICE CAR HESITATED briefly on 42nd Street near Times Square. A tall, lean figure stepped in and the car catapulted forward like a scared jackrabbit, its siren rising in a banshee howl.

"Merlini," Inspector Gavigan said, "the gentleman whose lap you just

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landed in is George Hurley. He's chief of the Division of Investigation and Patrol of the Customs Service, and he wants to ask you a question."

The gnome-like little man who appeared as Merlini moved over had a neat military moustache, a mild pleasant voice, and cold blue eyes. "I want to know," he said flatly, "how you would go about making nearly half a million dollars disappear?"

It is no easy matter to startle a magician, but that did it. The Great Merlini blinked, hesitated, then said, "That sounds like fun. Where do I get—"

"It's not cash," Gavigan put in. "It's ice."

"Nearly half a million? Did somebody steal the North Pole?"

"No jokes, please. To the crooks George and I associate with, ice means jewels — and you know it."

"In this case," Hurley explained, "diamonds. An Amsterdam dealer gave us the tip-off and we've had the suspect under observation ever since. A Customs Agent came across on the same boat. Last night he searched the man's cabin and the stones were there then. The suspect had no visitors after that and didn't leave his cabin until the boat docked this morning. Three agents went up the gangplank the moment it hit the pier and covered him right from his cabin door to the customs inspection. No diamonds were listed on his declaration form, so we grabbed him. He got the A-One treatment — and there were no stones in his bags or on his person."

"A search by Customs men who are sure they smell contraband," Inspector Gavigan added, "is something to see. Hurley's boys are experts. They also took the cabin apart in case he hid the stuff there, intending to pick it up by coming back as a visitor on the next sailing day."

"That's an old one," Hurley said. "Most of the dodges are. I've found contraband in babies' milk bottles, wooden legs, phony rolls of camera film, fountain pens, chocolate creams, tulip bulbs, beards, a woman's hair-do, ear trumpets, hearing aids, mounted insect specimens, a shipment of boa constrictors, even on a corpse . . ."

"A corpse?"

"Yeah. One character kept bringing in relatives who had died abroad, always using a different port of entry. The day we got him, the body of his deceased sister — stolen from some French cemetery — was wrapped in a good many yards of Brussels lace and wearing $140,000 in gems."

"How big a package," Merlini asked, "does nearly a half million dollars worth of diamonds make?"

"These are all top quality blue-white stones. They crossed the Atlantic in his suitcase inside a silver cigarette lighter. Dimensions, two inches by three inches by one-quarter inch. When we opened it at inspection we found — just cotton and lighter fuel. What worries us is his profession."

"He sounds," Merlini guessed, "like a magician."

"And that," Gavigan announced, "wins you the trip to Hollywood, the

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automatic dishwasher, and one hundred pounds of soap flakes. He calls himself Aldo the Enigma. Know him?"

"Pierre Aldo. Yes. He's been playing the Continental music halls with a smooth card manipulation act."

"Cards!" Hurley almost snorted. "I've seen enough card tricks today to last me a lifetime. He's been doing them all morning. Says he has to practice because American cards are bigger than the ones he's been used to."

"They're quite a bit larger," Merlini said. "And there are only thirty-two cards in Écarté and Pique decks. He'd need a bit of practice to get the feel of an American fifty-two-card Poker-size deck."

"I'll give him a passing grade right now," Hurley said glumly. "I wouldn't sit in on any game that had him in the same room."

"The Sûreté doesn't recommend it," Gavigan added. "They report he's been booked twice on crooked gambling charges and once did a two-year stretch on a confidence rap."

"Merlini," Hurley said, "the Inspector tells me he's seen you make an elephant disappear. So, if you'll explain how a magician would go about making a small parcel of diamonds vanish into thin air, the Customs Service will give you a medal."

As the car stopped in front of a pier entrance, Merlini pushed his lighted cigarette into his closed left fist, blew a cloud of smoke at it, then slowly opened his fingers. The cigarette was gone.

"When I do that," he said, "I don't usually let a crew of Customs men search me. And when I make an elephant disappear I don't let the audience take the theater apart the way you must have done with Aldo's luggage and cabin. I can see I'm going to enjoy meeting the enigmatic Pierre. He may have a new one up his sleeve."

Gavigan opened the car door. "Let's go. Hurley can only hold this bird for twenty-four hours and there's not much of it left."

A Customs Agent stood on guard before a door on A deck. "That's his cabin," Hurley said, "but all the movable furniture, bedding, and such stuff is in here." He opened the door of the cabin just opposite. Three chairs, a mattress, sheets, pillows, two lamps, a writing desk, and several dresser drawers occupied the center of the room. The bottom coverings of the chairs had been removed exposing the springs; the lamps had been disassembled.

"He watched your examination?" Merlini asked.

Hurley nodded. "That's standard practice. It's the suspect who gives us the most help. When he's calm and relaxed we know we're looking in the wrong places. But when he begins to get nervous it means we're getting warm. I once examined three trunks, four suitcases, and a couple of hatboxes, and found a pearl necklace inside a bottle of suntan oil in under five minutes just by keeping one eye on the woman. But Aldo doesn't seem

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to have nerves. He just sits there dealing himself pat Poker hands and grinning every time we draw a blank. He's been grinning a lot." Hurley waved a hand at the furniture. "You want to give this stuff a once-over?"

"I doubt it," Merlini said. "Let's take a look at Pierre. But don't tell him I'm a magician."

The writers of advertising copy who describe the luxurious cabin appointments for the cruise folders would have been shocked at the bare, cheerless aspect of Aldo's cabin. The only remaining decoration, if you could call him that, was a tired and very glum Customs Agent who leaned against one wall. He was scowling at a fat, round-faced little man sitting cross-legged on the floor — a man no movie director would have ever cast as a cardsharp, and one no card player would have ever suspected of possessing the ability he was now demonstrating.

His right hand, holding a deck of cards, moved up and down in a blur of motion, shuffling the cards off into his left. Then, with the rapid precision of a well-oiled automaton, he dealt five hands of Poker. He looked up at the glum Customs Agent and grinned broadly.

"Okay?"

The Agent grunted. "I didn't see anything wrong with the deal, but then I'm no slow-motion camera. My money says the best cards are in your hand again."

Aldo laughed. "I do not play cards for money. If I win everyone thinks I cheat. If I lose they say I am a no-good magician."

In one continuous fluid movement Aldo's right hand gathered the cards he had dealt to himself, turned them face up, and spread them in a neat fan. He had a Full House — three Aces and two Kings.

"But if the sucker doesn't know you're a magician," Hurley said from the doorway, "you take him to the cleaners."

Aldo scooped up the remaining cards and shuffled the deck again. "Cleaners?" he asked, still grinning. "What is that?" He began dealing again, this time with one hand only.

"Enjoying himself, isn't he?" Gavigan said.

Hurley nodded. "He's acting much too damned pleased with himself. And that means the stuff is here somewhere — right under our noses."

Aldo said nothing. He smiled enigmatically and turned up a Royal Flush in Spades.

Merlini looked down at the open empty suitcase on the floor near the foot of the bed. Its contents had been laid out neatly beside it. "You find some odd things in a magician's luggage, don't you?"

Hurley grunted. "Colored silk handkerchiefs by the yard, a couple hundred feet of rope, a bird cage, a dozen billiard balls —"

Merlini picked up one of the balls and hefted it. "These are all solid?"

"Yeah." Hurley pointed to a small red-lacquered box bearing Chinese

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characters. "That has a secret compartment, but it's empty. We took all this stuff and the clothes he's wearing down to Varick Street and gave them a fluoroscopic examination. That doesn't spot diamonds too well — they're nearly transparent to X-rays — but it'll show cavities in objects that should be solid."

Inspector Gavigan picked up a book, *La Prestidigitation Sans Appareils*, and riffled the pages.

"No hollowed-out books," Hurley said. "We cut his soap into little pieces, squeezed out all his toothpaste and shaving cream, cut open every last pill in half a dozen medicine bottles, took his pen and wrist watch apart. His teeth and eyes are his own."

"Teeth and eyes?"

"False teeth made to hold gems aren't too uncommon, and an importer once got past us declaring all his diamonds except the big one inside his glass eye."

Gavigan looked into the bathroom. "Plumbing?" he asked.

"We took most of it apart; the rest we probed."

Aldo dealt himself four Aces. "*Les flics*," he said, "*sont formidables*. They miss nothing."

"And what," Merlini wanted to know, "was the searching routine on our nimble-fingered friend here?"

"I'll show you," Hurley said. "On your feet, wise guy."

The Cheshire-cat grin that had seemed to be permanently affixed to the magician's moon-like face vanished abruptly.

"Not the pill again! *Ça, je refuse absolument!*"

"No. We'll skip the cathartic this time. But start stripping."

Pierre Aldo put the deck on the floor, scooped up the Aces, turned them face down, snapped his fingers, then counted the cards face up. There were still four, but the Aces were now Kings. He dropped these on the deck, stood up, removed his coat, and began to unknot his tie.

"I do this now three times. Soon I am good enough for the Folies Bergère. Pierre Aldo — *Le Prestidigitateur Nu!*"

The glum Customs Agent turned the pockets of the coat inside out, then the sleeves. He felt the lining inch by inch and tossed the garment to Merlini who did the same. The man's necktie, shirt, undershirt, trousers, shoes, socks and, finally, his shorts got the same painstaking inspection.

"New heels, I see," Merlini said as he examined the shoes.

"Courtesy of the Customs Service," Hurley explained. "We replaced the ones we cut up."

"You also pay for *les funérailles*," Aldo asked, "when I die from *la pneumonie?*"

Hurley threw him his shorts. Aldo, grinning again now, climbed into them.

"Well?" Hurley eyed Merlini without much hope. "What did we miss?"

"I think," the magician said slowly, "that you saw a little too much. One thing — a small piece of misdirection

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— made you jump unconsciously to a hasty conclusion."

Hurley didn't believe it. "Are you telling me there is a place we haven't looked?"

"I am. As you said — right under our noses. But first I want to ask a favor. If I'm right, Pierre's next stop will be a Federal prison. Since I may not see him again very soon, I'd like to show him one trick before he goes."

Aldo who had picked up his shirt nearly dropped it. "You are a magician?" He wasn't smiling now.

"I do a little magic," Merlini said. "I liked that Poker deal of yours, but I can top it. You shuffle, cut, and deal four Bridge hands. I won't touch the cards at all and yet I'll get a perfect hand."

"The Bridge?" Aldo said slowly. "I do not know the Bridge so well."

"Four players," Merlini told him. "The complete deck is dealt, and a perfect hand is all the cards of one suit. The odds against getting it by chance are 158,753,389,899 to 1."

Aldo sat on the floor again, picked up the deck, and began shuffling slowly. He looked thoughtful. "You want to make a little bet on that?"

"Sure," Merlini said. "At those odds I can bet you between two and three ten-thousandths of a cent against the missing half million in diamonds."

"I think," Aldo said, "that you lose." He dealt rapidly but stopped after four cards had been dealt to each hand, and turned those in front of Merlini face up. "How can you get thirteen cards of one suit when the first four are Aces?"

"You might give me a square deal," Merlini said. "Suppose I shuffle the cards once first." He held out his hand.

Aldo wasn't interested. "*Non!* The trick is impossible. You are talking through the hat."

George Hurley suddenly lost patience in a battle of magicians that might even have made hocus-pocus history.

He exploded. "You can play games with this character in his cell! I want to know where this hiding place is you say we missed — and right now!"

Where did Aldo the Enigma hide the diamonds?

Mail your solution at once to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York . . . $250 in cash prizes for the 31 best solutions . . . reflect, detect, and collect!

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A TEST OF IDENTITY

by MICHAEL INNES

"YES," INSPECTOR APPLEBY SAID as we strolled to the far end of his study, "I do keep a bit of a museum in this room. A sign of old age and the reminiscent mood, no doubt."

He pointed to a range of well-ordered shelves. "You may find them depressing. For these things connect up, one way or another, with every sort of wickedness under the sun."

"All of them?"

"Well, no. One or two recall affairs that would have to be termed bizarre, I suppose, rather than nefarious. For example, that photograph. What do you make of it?"

I found myself studying a formal, three-quarter length portrait of a young man, taken full face and looking straight at the camera. A professional job, I thought, but of rather an old-fashioned sort.

"Attract you?" No comment had occurred to me, and Appleby appeared to feel I needed prompting. "Or do you prefer a man to be handsome in a more regular way?"

"The features are certainly irregular enough," I said. "But they have vitality. For what it is worth, then, your specimen *does* attract me. Was he a great criminal?"

Appleby smiled. "That was the question which confronted us. Did you ever hear of Leonard Morton?"

"Never. Is this his photograph?"

Appleby smiled. "Sit down, my dear chap, and I'll tell you the tale."

"It is sometimes said that if the whole population was fingerprinted the police and the law courts would be saved some pretty large headaches. And Morton is a case in point.

"His parents had been wealthy folk who lost their lives in some accident when he was a baby. There were no near relatives, and young Leonard was brought up in a careful enough, but rather impersonal, way. Nobody had much occasion to be interested in him, and he seems to have had no talent for impressing himself upon the world.

"You spoke of vitality. I suspect he shoved most of that into a rugger scrum. And by his companions there, I suppose, he was remembered only as so much heave and shove. He made no *print*, so to speak, as a personality. Which was awkward, in view of what happened.

"He took off into the skies one day — it was for the purpose of bombing Berlin — and ceased to be a recognizable physical object some hours later."

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I was horrified. "Do you mean," I asked Appleby, "that he was charred to a cinder?"

"Nothing so drastic. But he was abominably burned. Or that was the story the world was asked to believe later. At the time, Morton was posted as missing, believed killed. No word of him came through, you see, as a P.O.W. or anything else. Then the war ended, and suddenly there was this mutilated man with his story — his story of being Leonard Morton.

"There was nothing out of the way in it. He had baled out; every rag had been blasted or burned off him; and for a long time he had suffered a complete loss of memory. And now here he was back in England, proposing to claim quite a substantial fortune. But was he Morton?

"If he wasn't, he had certainly *known* Morton — and known him as quite a young man, before the war started. There could, it seemed, be no doubt about that. If he was an impostor, he wasn't impersonating a dead man whom he had met for the first time in a hospital or prison camp. But here certainty ended."

Appleby paused at this to stare thoughtfully at the photograph, and a question occurred to me. "At which point did you come into the affair?"

"In the first few days. There was, you see, an important time element in the matter. For a reason I'll presently explain, it was essential that the truth be got at quickly.

"Sooner or later, of course, it was *bound* to be got at — although a bold impostor might well persuade himself it wasn't so. The claimant — as I suppose he should be called — hadn't materialized miraculously on a frontier of postwar Germany. He had come out in a train, and the train had had a starting point, and so on. There existed, as you can guess, a highly efficient organization for tackling just such problems, and there was little doubt that in the end the facts would be run to earth."

"But meanwhile there was this important time element?"

"Precisely. Nearly everybody's relations with Morton had been impersonal, as I've said. Or, if not impersonal, say professional. Schoolmasters, holiday tutors, trustees, executors, bankers — and so on. They could none of them be confident, one way or the other. Quite early they got together and held a sort of committee of inquiry on the young man, with a fellow called Firth, who was senior trustee, in the chair.

"Well, the claimant did pretty well. When he realized that they conceived it their duty to question his identity, he behaved very much as the genuine man might have been expected to do — if the genuine man was a pretty decent and forbearing sort of fellow. The committee was impressed, but by no means convinced.

"And then the claimant sprang a bombshell. There was after all, it appeared, one highly personal relationship in his life. Shortly before that bombing trip he had met and become engaged to a young lady. He de-

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manded to be confronted with her. And the young lady, when named, proved to be the only daughter of the occasion's Grand Inquisitor."

I stared. "Firth?"

Appleby bobbed his head. "Exactly. . . . and that was where I came in. Miss Firth — at least, according to her father's idea of her — was a young person of an extremely delicate nervous constitution; and to be presented with a lover from the grave, and later see him unmasked as an impostor, would be quite, quite fatal to her. So Firth came and besought me. Could I resolve the puzzle straightaway, or at least arrive at some reliable opinion? I said, I thought I could."

"And you did?"

"Yes. Not in a fashion that would have had much value as evidence in a court. But at least it gave Firth confidence in choosing a line.

"I did a quick rake around photographers who might have had dealings with young Morton just before the war — and then some equally quick work in our own laboratories and files. When I met the young man — whose face was certainly badly disfigured — I had a batch of portraits, including the one that you see hanging here. I asked him to select his own portrait, and he promptly chose this one. I wonder if you can see what that meant to me?"

"I don't know that I can."

"I was able to tell Firth that the claimant was certainly genuine, and that his daughter might be brought along."

This floored me completely. "My dear Appleby, I don't see —"

"I realize you don't. Imagine you're a tailor, and try again."

Inspiration came to me. "The buttons and buttonholes!"

Appleby was delighted. "Splendid! What about them?"

"They're on the wrong side. *The printing has been reversed!*"

"Exactly. I found a photograph of Morton, and had this reverse print prepared. The two looked substanially different, because human features are never symmetrical, and his were more irregular than most. *Both* prints were included in the batch he was to sort through to find himself. You see what was involved?"

"I'm blessed if I do still."

"If he chose the original print, he was choosing a Leonard Morton he recognized from life. If he chose the reverse print, he was choosing a Leonard Morton he had never seen — *except in a mirror.*

"That, you see, was how I knew he was the genuine Morton."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ANTHONY GILBERT**

TITLE: ***Remember Madame Clementine***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: Devonshire, England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *When Cynthia was seventeen, the fortune teller promised her a lot of money — and something else that Cynthia and her two best friends, Agatha and Anne, would never forget . . .*

I ONLY SAW MADAME CLEMENTINE once, and that was nearly 30 years ago. She was telling fortunes at a fete for Destitute Children, and Miss Bennett gave the seniors the afternoon off "in a good cause." I went with my friends, Agatha and Cynthia. We were all seventeen at the time.

It was Agatha who said we must all have half-a-crown's-worth. Cynthia hung back.

"She might tell me something horrible," she demurred.

"They aren't allowed to," Agatha assured her. She was the obviously successful member of the trio — you couldn't imagine life daring to cheat Agatha — while Cynthia was the beauty. And how, as my sons say! I was what is still called the Plain Jane.

"You'll come, Anne," Agatha continued, swinging round to me.

"Just for a joke," I said.

Agatha went first and came back saying Madame Clementine was really quite reliable. She'd told her she would have a successful life, with fame and fortune.

"Which is just what I intend," nodded Agatha. "I only wanted to see how much she really knew."

Then it was my turn. Madame Clementine took my hand, glanced at it, and returned it to me.

"That's the kind of hand I like best," she said. "My dear, you will have a very happy life."

"Is that all you're going to tell me?" I asked, thinking, I suppose, it wasn't very much for half-a-crown.

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Madame stared. "All? What more could you desire? Yours is the best of fortunes. Money loses its value and beauty dies, but happiness is immortal."

We had to coax Cynthia to go in. In my heart I didn't believe any harm could come to anyone so lovely. I used to wonder what it must feel like to know that heads were turning wherever you went. I must say for Cynthia she hardly seemed aware of it.

She was away longer than either of us, and when she returned she was chalk-white and walking like a blind person.

We were horrified. "Pull yourself together, Cynnie," exclaimed Agatha. "What on earth's the matter?"

It was quite a minute before she could speak. Then she said with a pitiful attempt at *sangfroid*, "Oh, I'm coming into money. A lot of money. Think of that. Only of course I shan't. We've no fabulous uncle in Australia, and I'm not clever like Agatha."

"You'll marry a millionaire, of course," I said.

I thought she would faint. "No, Anne, that's the awful thing she told me. If I marry it will end in violent death."

After that summer I didn't see either of them for years, though I heard of Agatha, of course. Even a person as unfashionable as myself couldn't miss the success she'd made, with a salon in London and a flat in Paris and dress shows to which everybody came who could beg, borrow, or steal an admission ticket. Madame Clementine had proved right about me, too. I had eight happy years at home with my mother and when she died all the lights of the world seemed to go out. Then Barry Frost fell in love with me — me, the plain, ordinary Anne Gardner — and we were married and my happiness flowered like an orchard in spring.

Of Cynthia I heard nothing; we moved in different worlds.

One day when the twins were fifteen I came up to London to renew their school outfits, and later, while window-shopping on Bond Street, I heard someone call my name.

"Anne! Anne!"

I turned; a taxi-door flashed open and a hand caught my wrist.

"Get in quick! You're holding up the traffic."

It was Agatha. I couldn't mistake her voice and manner, though I stared in amazement at the elegant sophisticated woman at my side, trying to reconcile her with sturdy opinionated Agatha Page of Miss Bennett's school.

We talked as women do who haven't met for years and she took me back to her Club for tea. She didn't seem to notice I was wearing last year's reach-me-down and did my own hair.

"Do you ever hear anything of Cynthia Maxwell?" I asked presently.

"Good old Madame Clementine!" murmured Agatha. "Wake up, Anne.

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You must remember Madame Clementine."

I hadn't thought of her for years, but now I remembered her and her prophecy for Cynthia — a lot of money and marriage ending in violent death. I shivered.

"Did any of it come true?"

"The money did. She was left a fortune from a most unexpected source. As for the other — well." She shrugged narrow elegant shoulders. "She has too much sense to test it."

"You mean, she's not married? That lovely girl. She — she didn't lose her looks, did she?"

"Oh, no. If possible, she's lovelier than ever. She comes to me for her clothes. It would almost pay me to dress her for nothing."

"And yet she didn't marry?" It seemed to me tragic.

"Being beautiful doesn't help you much if you're dead," retorted Agatha. "And everything else Madame prophesied has come true. In Cynthia's shoes I wouldn't have married either. And you can stop looking sorry for her, Anne. She has a wonderful time. Her country house is a showplace; she has a flat in town and the sort of car that must be seen to be believed — she's gone all mechanical-minded, if you can believe it. She knows everyone . . ."

But I was thinking — no Barry, no twins, no nine-year-old Simon — and my heart bled for Cynthia.

In the strange way things happen in life I was to hear of Cynthia again within the month and this time, to cap all, it was the announcement of her engagement and forthcoming marriage to a man named Raymond Martin. On impulse I wrote to congratulate her, and to my delighted amazement she not only remembered who I was, but invited me to come to London and meet her fiancé. I cancelled a W.I. meeting and a whist drive and came up on an excursion ticket.

Cynthia's flat was like something in the movies, and Cynthia herself was so radiantly beautiful she almost bowled me over. She looked at least ten years younger than I did, though we were the same age.

"Anne, darling, you haven't changed a scrap! You always looked as though life had just handed you the world on a plate. Tell me, do you remember Madame Clementine?"

I said Agatha had reminded me of her a few weeks before. She looked surprised.

"But until then you had forgotten? How could you, Anne? I never did. She actually stopped me getting married more than once, but now I'm so grateful because it means I'm free for Raymond."

We talked for a bit and then Raymond came in, and I had a second shock. Because he must have been five years younger than Cynthia looked, and was as unforgettable in his way as she in hers. Only — I didn't like his way. Perhaps living for nearly twenty years with an honest man has prejudiced me against charm,

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Raymond's kind at all events. For in him, you see, charm wasn't simply an incidental — it was a profession. It was his bread-and-butter, it kept working hours. When there was nothing to be gained by it he switched it off, as you switch off a light when you leave a room; and just as a flick of your finger makes everything dark, so, when his charm was turned off, there was nothing but darkness left. Naturally, Cynthia didn't see that, but then, for her, the light never went out.

"He's only marrying her for her money," I told Barry when I got back. "What can we do about it?"

"Nothing," said Barry sensibly. "She's a grown woman and she must be allowed to make a mess of her life if she chooses. And it may not be a mess."

I shrank from telling him about Madame Clementine. He'd have thought I was going out of my mind.

"If she chooses to invest — oh, speculate, if you like — in a husband instead of stocks and shares, it's her funeral," he insisted.

Which was precisely what I feared it was going to be.

I wrote to Agatha, but she was in New York and by the time she got back it was too late. The marriage had taken place, and bride and bridegroom had flown to Italy for their honeymoon. Barry would say I was morbid but it wouldn't have surprised me to hear that somehow Cynthia had vanished from the plane *en route*.

But she sent me postcards from Rome and Naples — *Deliriously happy* — and when they came back they settled in her house in Devonshire. She even invited me to stay, but one of the twins had measles, so I had to refuse and the chance didn't come again.

They'd been married about six months, when I got an agitated letter from Agatha.

> *For pity's sake make some excuse and go down to Cynthia. I'd go myself if I could get away. Apparently the whole village is humming with gossip. Raymond's got a woman in the next village and spends half his time going over there. I happen to know Cynthia's made a will in his favor, and — as usual — the wife's always the last to know.*

And then in big sprawling letters: *Remember Madame Clementine!*

Barry said it was ridiculous, but I felt the same as Agatha. I wrote to Cynthia that I'd had 'flu and the doctors wanted me to get away and would she like to revive her original invitation, and I got a letter by return mail, saying I was to come immediately and stay as long as I could.

Raymond met me at the station, driving a magnificent green Broadbent.

"Cynthia's wedding present," he told me. "Isn't she a beauty?"

He patted the side of the hood as if it were the flanks of a mare.

"Do you drive, Anne? I can call you Anne, can't I?"

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"I wouldn't dare drive that," I told him frankly, remembering our ancient Morris.

His hand touched mine for an instant. "To tell you the truth, she scares me, too," he acknowledged. "It's a comfort to remember that Broadbents are foolproof. Speaking for myself, I drive by guess and by God." He did, too; I had ample proof of that in the next twenty minutes.

"Cynthia doesn't trust me a yard," he went on comfortably, as the car dashed along at what seemed to me a reckless pace. "She won't come out with me unless we're just driving on the flat. There's a place near here called Dead Man's Hill." He chuckled. "I'll take you there one day, if you'll come. The authorities have put up a skull-and-cross-bones on the hairpin bend. If you lost control of the car there for even 30 seconds you'd have had it. I suppose," he wound up meditatively, "that skull grinning at you would be the last thing you'd see before you plunged into eternity."

I felt my scalp prickle. I was sure then how and where it would happen, that violent death foreseen by Madame so many years ago.

"Why take the car down that hill?" I murmured, and he laughed.

"Oh, it's quite a favorite trip of mine," he said.

He didn't have to tell me why he went that way so often. Agatha had done that in her letter. I wondered if Cynthia had any inkling of the truth. Even before we reached the house I'd have given anything to be back in the shabby rectory with Barry and the children.

I had expected Cynthia to look haggard and wan, but, on the contrary, she looked wonderful. She sparkled like the sea when the sun's on it. But I couldn't understand how it was she couldn't see through Raymond's veneer of charm to the falsity that lay just under the surface.

I remember Agatha's *The wife's always the last to know.*

I must admit Raymond played up wonderfully. He was as attentive to Cynthia as if they were still honeymooners, and the perfect host to me. But nothing dulled my conviction that he was only marking time.

Madame's prophecy was fulfilled the night before I was due to go home. At lunch-time Cynthia asked how I'd like to spend my last afternoon with them — how about a drive? I said I thought I'd walk down to the village and buy a few souvenirs for the people at home, and then pack quietly.

"You come out with me, Cynnie," Raymond suggested.

"No, no," cried my heart, but Cynthia agreed placidly. I wished I had the courage to say I'd changed my mind, but I hadn't. As I left the house Raymond brought the car round to the front and went in to tell Cynthia he'd be ready in five minutes. Cynthia came down to the gate and waved me off.

"Ask Mrs. Rose for tea if we're not back," she said.

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Not back! Well I knew the two of them would never come back — I knew it as certainly as I knew my own name.

I did my shopping and lingered over tea in the village; I wanted to put off my return as long as I could, but sooner or later I had to go back. The instant Mrs. Rose opened the door for me I knew it had happened.

"Oh, Mrs. Frost," she whispered, "there's been a terrible accident."

I felt my heart freeze. "The car?" But I knew the answer.

"Yes, madam. That dreadful hill. Cars shouldn't be allowed to go down there. I always knew there'd be a crash sooner or later."

"Dead?" I whispered.

She nodded. "Oh, yes, madam. No one would have a chance. The car's smashed to pieces, that lovely car. There was a witness, a gentleman; he said it seemed to go out of control."

"So much for Broadbents being foolproof," I said bitterly.

"He said something about a nut working loose, they didn't know how," she amplified.

I could tell you, I thought. In my mind's eye I saw a murderous finger and thumb deliberately turning the nut, insuring catastrophe.

Mrs. Rose was speaking again. "Thank goodness, she wasn't in it," she said.

"She — wasn't —?" I didn't think I'd heard right.

"No, Mrs. Frost. At the last minute Madam had a headache and decided to stay at home. I daresay if she'd gone with him it wouldn't have happened. Mrs. Martin would never go with her husband on that hill."

Her voice said it was a judgment on him.

Cynthia came down later, very pale, very remote.

"Oh, Cynnie," I whispered, "Mrs. Rose told me." But that's all I could say; the words stuck in my throat.

Cynthia came over to the mantelpiece. "It had to happen some time," she said calmly. "I suppose this is what Madame Clementine foresaw." And then, unbelievably, she laughed. That laughter rang through the house. "It's all right, Anne," she said between gasps, "I'm not hysterical. I'm just thinking how funny it is to realize we all took it for granted the violent death would be *mine!* And yet, there are two parties to every marriage."

I couldn't meet her eyes. I longed only to leave the house and never see her again. Because I knew *now* with shattering certainty whose finger and thumb had turned that nut so that, on the hill, the car would go out of control.

"Cynthia's a mechanic," Agatha had said.

And — "I drive by guess and by God," confessed Raymond.

I remembered again what Agatha had said. *The wife's always the last to know.*

The last? I wonder!

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THE TOOTH AND THE NAIL *by BILL S. BALLINGER* (HARPER, $2.95)	". . . highly original and very well worked out . . . Excellent." (AdV)	". . . the story works up a fine excitement . . . good writing; a completely new idea." (LGO)
HELL IS A CITY *by WILLIAM ARD* (RHINEHART, $2.75)	". . . reaches too far . . . but . . . driving story movement and acute economy." (AB)	". . . melodrama works out plausibly and thrillingly . . . miraculously compressed style." (LGO)
THE HIDDEN GRAVE *by PETER HARDIN* (HARPER, $2.75)	". . . pretentious prose, luridly improbable events and incoherent characterization." (AB)	". . . well developed . . . strong, sensual narrative style . . . promise in this newcomer." (LGO)

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key at bottom gives sources.

SCALES OF JUSTICE *by NGAIO MARSH* (LITTLE, BROWN, $3.)	". . . her best pure formal detective story in a great many years . . . vitality and charm . . . " (AB)	"Very nearly up to Marsh's best, this is a charmer." (LGO)
THE BROKEN DOLL *by JACK WEBB* (RINEHART, $2.75)	". . . especially good on minority groups . . . characterizations ring true . . ." (AdV)	"There is some honest tugging at your heart-strings here . . . " (H-M)
WIDOW'S PLIGHT *by RUTH FENISONG* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	". . . a rather muddled plot . . . but it succeeds nicely in memorable characterization." (AB)	". . . swift moving tale . . . gentle humor . . . rather slender motivation . . ." (H-M)
THE PINNED MAN *by GEORGE GRISWOLD* (LITTLE, BROWN, $3.)	"Muted and deadpan, but pretty exciting . . . Good cloak and dagger." (AdV)	". . . the adventures — with no romance to retard them — are as lively as ever." (LGO)
THE CAUTIOUS MAIDEN *by CECIL ST. LAURENT* (CROWN, $2.50)	". . . a something less than urgent novelistic theme." (AB)	"All talk, small satisfaction. C minus." (LGO)
WALK A WICKED MILE *by ROBERT P. HANSEN* (MILL-MORROW, $2.75)	"Plenty action, nice love story, good local color, smooth writing." (AdV)	"Kisses plentiful, also belly-blows, but action is spotty . . ." (SC)
TRAITOR'S PASS *by DAVID DUFF* (ROY, $2.50)	". . . ultimately crude example of the British spy-thriller . . . " (AB)	". . . usual props, but pace is heady. Nice chase job." (SC)

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*
LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
FP: *Fay Profilet in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

Perhaps the most significant development in last year's competition — EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest — was the remarkable number of top prizes won by those writers who had originally been discovered by EQMM or those well-known authors who had never written short stories but were now encouraged to do so especially for EQMM. In the latter category there were two: Shirley Barker, an established historical novelist, won a Second Prize for her first short story, "The Fog on Pemble Green," and Wade Miller, a collaboration with nearly twenty detective-mystery novels already to their credit, won a Second Prize for their first short story, "Invitation to an Accident." But the record was even more startling in the first category — writers discovered by EQMM. Out of eleven top prize-winners last year, no less than five — nearly half! — made their literary debuts in the pages of EQMM.

A truly impressive development . . . Stanley Ellin's very first story, the memorable "The Specialty of the House," appeared in EQMM, issue of May 1948; last year Stanley Ellin's "The Moment of Decision" won First Prize. Joseph Whitehill's first story, "The Day of the Last Rock Fight," was published in the June 1954 issue of EQMM; last year Joseph Whitehill's "Stay Away from My Mother" won the Special Award of Merit. Vinnie Williams's first story, "A Matter of the Tax Payers' Money," was printed in EQMM, issue of October 1949; last year Vinnie Williams's "Dodie and the Boogerman" won a Second Prize. James Yaffe's first story, "Department of Impossible Crimes" (written when the author was at the ripe young age of fifteen!), was offered to EQMM readers in our issue of July 1943; last year James Yaffe's "Mom Makes a Wish" won a Second Prize.

And Donald McNutt Douglass's first story, "The Ghost of Greenwich Village," represented the author's baptism in print when it appeared in EQMM's February 1954 issue; last year Mr. Douglass won a Second Prize with "The Perfectionist" — the story we now bring to you. "The Perfectionist" is an unusual example of how much a writer can grow in a single year — for this new story by Mr. Douglass shows considerable advance over his first story. The canvas is bigger, the characterizations are more fully realized, the style is more mature. Indeed, you will find "The Perfectionist" a remarkably professional story for a relatively new writer:

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it is both sensuous and sensual; it is smart, suave, and even sly in its subtle sophistication. It is the story of the eternal Battle of the Sexes — a War of Nerves between a clever husband and a sensitive wife. The wife, you will be interested to learn, is The Most Beautiful Woman in New York and she is terribly afraid — afraid she has the bad taste to be . . . but we have told you enough!

THE PERFECTIONIST

by DONALD McNUTT DOUGLASS

THE ZOO IN CENTRAL PARK, NEW York 17, N. Y., is a pleasant place. On a Spring day when the sun is shining it is utterly charming. One black bear and a black panther are restless, hating their cages; the other animals seem content — the tigers and lions and that poor creature, the tigron, are asleep or torpid. A little old lady — evidently one who believes that rules are made to be broken — is feeding the elephants dandelion greens which ferment and make an elephant happy. The seals are vigorous and sportive, and the empty monkey cages look as though they had been designed by Bemelmans. The monkeys are too delicate to stand the fickle weather and are still inside, smelling abominably and acting like monkeys. Only one thing might be hoped for — that the children play less noisily.

It is surprising therefore to find Mr. Walter Brand, with a very good lunch inside him, his polo coat on the chair beside him and the sun warming his thick and well barbered hair, mentally complaining. The boisterous children do not disturb him, he can shut his mind to mundane things. He has found no fault with his luncheon, he knows that not only his polo coat but his entire wardrobe is impeccable, and he feels that the gray wings above his ears have added distinction to his proud locks and that the sun may deepen his attractive tan. But for a Zoo to exist without giraffes seems to him unpardonable. There is a place for them, he knows. He will not write a letter about it. One does not demean one's self with such trivialities. But he feels very strongly that someone has been careless and should be punished for it. No giraffes! He is seriously annoyed, for Mr. Brand is a perfectionist.

There were others on that terrace who were annoyed with Mr. Brand, for it was felt by some that he could enjoy the day and the sun without monopolizing one of the too few tables long after he had finished eating. Mr. Brand was unaware of this annoyance and would have been un-

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disturbed if he had been aware of it. There was a certain regal hauteur about the man that discouraged those who had even considered asking him to move. In this respect their instincts were correct. If one had asked him whether he would mind moving his coat so that someone else could share his table, Mr. Brand would have replied that he certainly did mind — and the ensuing small scene would have spoiled the would-be diner's digestion and fazed Mr. Brand not at all. Indeed, aside from the absent giraffes, he found nothing worthy of his attention. That is, until *she* came along.

She was rather taller than average, probably 25 to 30, slim and neatly but not tastefully dressed. She was walking slowly and shyly looking for an empty place on which to put her tray. She was nothing remarkable whatever except to the eyes of Walter Brand. He recognized her as beautiful. Mr. Brand, besides being a perfectionist and perhaps because of it, was a connoisseur. He made his living, which was an exceedingly good one, by the importation and sale of foreign objects of beauty. He recognized beauty at a glance whether it was covered with the dust of a century or disguised, as this one was, by an inappropriate setting and the wrong attire. He knew perfectly and precisely what the absolutely beautiful woman should look like. Not perfect features. There must be some tiny fault to show that the lady is human. But so nearly perfect that the tiny fault is adorable. And she must have an unidentifiable spark. Somehow this girl had it. She was a gem improperly cut and mounted in a garish setting entirely unworthy of her and, because he had seen it, of him. He rose quickly and bowed.

"Madam. Take this table please. I am just leaving."

"Oh! Thank you. Today it is very crowded." The *th* might almost have been *s*. The *very* might have been *fairy*, and when she smiled other less discerning eyes than his could see a glimpse of hidden beauty.

As she seated herself he picked up his coat. Then, "I see that you had the happy thought of iced coffee. Iced coffee is out of season and so this is exactly the time to have it." He replaced his coat on the chair and strode purposefully towards the cafeteria.

Now would be the time for her to escape, to leave her tray untouched, to rise swiftly and, gathering her gloves and purse, walk away as fast as she could. It would be better still to run, not looking behind her, until the city gave her sanctuary. But how was Magda Lederer to know? The thought of leaving did not cross her mind. When Walter Brand came back and sat beside her she was pleased.

"Yes, you were right, precisely," he said, sipping at his straw. "The man who says he dislikes champagne or beer or Coca Cola is a fool. There is a time and place for every drink. This is the time and place for iced coffee and I detect that they have the

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discrimination here to brew it long and dark."

Magda did not reply. She was eating. But she was pleased.

"My name," he said, "is Walter Blackford Brand. I am forty-one years old. I have a shop under my name at 507 Madison Avenue where we sell imported antiquities. I bank at the Fifth Avenue Bank, live at the Forest Hills Inn in Forest Hills, am a member of the New York and Huntington Yacht Clubs, and am a widower with no children."

Magda went on eating, more pleased than ever. Walter was pleased too. She ate delicately, without affectation, and detested chatter. He sat quietly, enjoying his thoughts until she had finished. He looked at her benevolently and said, "Now, tell me about yourself."

Magda was very shy but the quiet and direct approach had reassured her.

"My name is Magda Lederer. I am twenty-seven. I am born Hungarian but am an American citizen because my husband was. He was a flyer and was killed flying three years ago. I work for a decorator also on Madison Avenue. I have the afternoon off because we have nothing to decorate and she went home. I too am lonely." She smiled at him. "But I haff neffer had an avair and do not intend to 'ave one." Magda's accent invariably increased with the emotional context of her words.

"Splendid, splendid," he said. "In ten minutes we know each other and have put our cards, face up, on the table. And I agree with you. Affairs have a way of turning sordid. To my mind, sordid is the most distasteful word in the English language. And if there is one thing I pride myself upon, it is my taste."

Magda stood up. "We must leave," she said. "Others need our table." The figure, under the badly cut dress, was exquisite.

"May I spend your holiday afternoon in your company, Magda?" he asked.

"I would like that," she said simply. "Let us ride on the carousel. I have never done it here. One feels foolish behaving in a childish way alone. But with a companion, childish ways are fun."

There are other splendid things to do on a fine early Spring day when one is not alone. They took the sightseeing boat around Manhattan and it was almost empty and, by then, a little cold so that it seemed natural that most of the way he hold her hand. He took her to a tiny, quiet restaurant on Fifty-Eighth Street and convinced her with little trouble that this was the occasion for champagne.

She told him about her husband. It wasn't as tragic as it should have been. She had been twenty and had fallen for his dash. "Speed," they called him — Speed Lederer — and he had done everything with speed. Too much speed and dash, not time enough for tenderness. There had been four years, most of the time in separation, usually a day or two together, at most a week, and he would

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be off, speeding to somewhere. Finally he had run his fighter plane into a mountain and that was that — before she ever really knew him.

And Walter told her about Elsie. He told it well, sadly and courageously, trying in no way to absolve himself from blame. "Of course I was to blame," he said. "They said she jumped or fell. Ridiculous. When one is alone on the fifteenth floor of the Lord Baltimore Hotel one does not fall from the window. Of course she jumped, and, since she was not ill, it must have been because she was unhappy, desperately unhappy, with me. Why is another matter. In what way I failed her I cannot tell. For twelve years I was a loyal, faithful husband but somehow we grew apart. When she left to visit her mother I thought it a good idea, the change might do her good. I knew she was unhappy — she always had seeds of unhappiness within her. Some people are made that way and one cannot change them. But that she would take her own life — it seemed then and seems now — incredible. And it is deeply on my conscience."

"I shouldn't think it would have to be," she said, feeling sorry for him. "Even husbands and wives know very little about what goes on in the other's mind. Life is essentially lonely. She may have known people you did not know, had thoughts you never dreamed of. I can conceive of a wife having a tragedy completely separate and unknown to her husband."

"Perhaps. It is kind of you to say so. And tonight, for the first time in years, I do not feel lonesome."

"'Sank you. Nor I either."

They lingered long over their dinner and drank a little more champagne than was good for her but Walter was the perfect gentleman. He dropped her at her dingy little apartment on Fourth Avenue and, before he drove grandly off to Forest Hills, he gallantly kissed her hand. She walked up the two long flights of stairs rather unsteadily and had trouble with her key but when she looked in her mirror she was smiling. He had arranged for dinner and the opera, no less, for the following night. She took her lipstick and ringed the date, April 3, 1953, with a big red O.

The opera too was a great success. She always wept at *Madame Butterfly* and it pleased and warmed her that he also found it necessary to wipe his eyes. Again he dropped her formally, respectfully, and slightly inebriated at her door. But the following Saturday he became more direct. They were seated in his private office, which was beautifully furnished as such offices should be. His two clerks, he had explained, took care of all but the most important sales, for he found buying stimulating and selling unpleasant.

"You may have wondered, my dear, why I have been giving you such a rush."

"Yes." Her eyes crinkled. "Yes, I haff, Valter."

"It is because you are very beautiful."

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"No. I know better than that."

"You do not know it but it is nevertheless true. To be brutally frank, you have bad taste."

"Oh, I know that too. Mrs. Webster, for whom I work, has told me often enough. She only hires me because I can draw. She cannot draw."

"I did not realize how appalling your taste was until I showed you over the shop. You invariably picked the worst and did not even see the best."

"I know. Isn't it terrible?"

"It *is* terrible — so I will proceed to transform you. Your hair, your make-up, your clothes — bah! That evening gown you apologized for — you knew it was bad but you had no idea how bad. It was hideous."

She laughed aloud. "But Valter, I could not afford, even if you tell me vot I buy."

"I will buy these things."

"No, Valter, dat I could not accept."

"That you will accept because my intentions are honorable. If you become what I know I can make you — the most beautiful woman in New York — I will ask you to marry me."

She was very much amused. "I neffer heard of anysing so romantic. Dat is vot you call a conditional proposal, no?"

"I am perfectly serious. We have an appointment with Isadora Elmenstein at 11."

"And who is Isadora Elmenstein?"

"Your mirror will tell you after we have seen her."

Six hours later — after the visit to Isadora Elmenstein — Walter Brand called the little French fitter at Bergdorf-Goodman's aside.

"Here is my card." With it was a large bill.

"Yes, *Monsieur* Bhrant, oowhat do you weesh?"

"You will help madame into these things I have picked out?"

"*Oui, Monsieur.*"

"You will see that she is completely nude and you will report to me any imperfections, bulges, wrinkles, moles, scars, pendulosity."

"Imperfection. Bulges, wrinkles, *grain de beauté, cicatrice*, oui. Pendulosity? Ah, oui. *Pendant.*" She laughed. "*Comprend bien, Monsieur.*"

In fifteen minutes she was back. "*Imperfection? Non. Parfait, magnifique! Monsieur* ees een luck."

"Thank you," he replied without a smile. It was the second such report he had had that day. Mr. Brand never did things by halves: a thing worth doing was worth doing thoroughly, and it was well to check.

He and Magda stood before the tall pier glass.

"Regard yourself, my dear. Galatea is finished."

"The hair is good. Black is much better. And the clothes are wonderful. I feel like a fallen woman. But it is still me."

"Yes, it was always there — but hidden. I have merely brought it to light."

In the mirror she caught his eyes and saw the desire in them and was,

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for a moment, frightened. But as they left the store and walked over to the Plaza for a cocktail, as they drank and had dinner, as they stood in the theater lobby during intermissions, she saw that it was not "still me." Always eyes were on her — eyes of men and women alike. He must have transformed her more than she herself could see.

On Sunday it was the same. Everywhere they went people would stop talking, stop thinking of what they were thinking, to look at her. One would have to be a fool not to admit to one's self that she had become, overnight, a sensation.

He could have satisfied his desire on Sunday. Her head was dizzy with champagne. She felt that he had given her so much, she could give him a little bit of her. But instead he asked her to marry him and that is not a little bit, it is giving all.

"Oh, Valter, I cannot belief you are serious. It vas as if I vas — I am so mixed up! I cannot be de mos' beautiful voman in New York. Dot is crazy! An' yet people look at me like I vas!"

She was honestly surprised.

"You are. I have made you so. But I do not want you to marry me now. I have not even kissed you. I do not want to hurry you. But I tried an experiment and it has succeeded. You are the most beautiful woman in New York and I don't want you as my mistress. I want you as my wife. I want you to promise to marry me in six months."

"Oh, Valter!" It was a reprieve. "If you still vant me den, I vill."

He was a clever fellow, that Walter Brand, a perfectionist, knowing what he wanted and how to get it. The next day, Monday, he did not see her and on Tuesday, seven days after he had met her, he sailed for Europe to do his annual buying. If he had not gone away and she had seen him regularly for six months she never would have married him. Magda Lederer did not have taste but she did have character and insight. That hectic glamorous week with her transformation as its climax was the biggest thing in her life. When she reported for work on Monday, her employer, Mrs. Martha Webster, literally keeled over. She sat down heavily on a brocaded love seat and put her hands to her beautifully coiffured white hair.

"Holy —!" she said, not blasphemous but awed. "What have you done to yourself?"

"I've dyed my hair," said Magda diffidently.

"What have you found? A new hormone? Dyed your hair! My sainted charge accounts! When you left this place on Friday night you were a colorless drudge. I'm sorry. You were always sweet but you had as much oomph as stale beer. Now you walk in here and you are the most gorgeous dish I ever saw in my whole life."

"I'm engaged," said Magda, herself rather awed at the reception.

"Listen, child." Mrs. Webster was

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regaining her composure. "I have read more women's magazine stories than you have. I know that becoming engaged is supposed to brighten the eye and tone up the blood. I have even been engaged myself and these snowy curls came straight out of a bottle — but please give me a blow-by-blow description! What happened to you?"

Magda felt like a schoolgirl caught smoking. "Last Tuesday I met Mr. Walter Brand. He picked me up."

"The antique dealer up the street?"

Magda nodded.

"I know him. He's good."

"He said I did everything wrong. My powder and rouge, my hair, my clothes."

"Yes, yes. I could have told you that. So he bought you these clothes. . . . Well, the old saying is right: you can't tell a book by its cover. Anyway, congratulations."

That was the way it went: When she saw him off on the *Liberté* she got more attention than the ship itself and Walter felt a warm glow from being envied. For she had promised to marry him.

But she would not have done so if he had stayed — and Walter knew it. She liked him. He had changed her life — but that did not mean she loved him. She did *not* love him, but he was not there to remind her of the fact. So the other suitors — and there were many who, from the unlikeliest spots, came suddenly to flock around — were kept at bay. And when he returned and had picked out a suitable apartment on Sixty-Fourth Street, they were married quietly, with Mrs. Webster as her attendant, in the Chapel of the Church of the Heavenly Rest.

That little fact of Mrs. Webster's being her attendant speaks volumes. Martha Webster was not as discerning as Walter Brand but when she was taught a lesson she learned it. When Walter returned from Europe, Magda was no longer employed by Mrs. Webster because she could draw. She was a junior partner because she not only could draw but she could double the business and had. Men who had balked at their wives' extravagant ideas found it a pleasure as long as the business was done through Mrs. Lederer, and even the frostiest dowagers were softened by her warm smile. Her taste had not improved but Mrs. Webster had enough for two. She still did small chores but her function was as business-getter and she found it fun. She was therefore entirely adamant about giving it up. Yes, she would marry Walter because she had promised and had no valid reason for changing her mind, but she insisted on keeping her job. This had irritated Walter at first but not for long. It meant that she was seen — in circulation, so to speak — during the day as well as in the evening when he paraded her. It gave him great satisfaction to be known as the husband of Mrs. Magda Brand.

Nor did marriage make Magda actively unhappy. She became bored with the parading — restaurants ev-

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ery night, cabarets, stares, and the conceit that seemed to ooze out of her husband on account of the stares. And the constant surveillance — "This is wrong, buy that — no, not that color, are you mad? This!" She was simply his most expensive *objet d'art*, and although she often felt like a freak in the circus, on what basis could she complain?

The real trouble would have to be explained by Dr. Kinsey. Walter's two scouts, Isadora Elmenstein and the French fitter at Bergdorf's had not lied. Naked, she was perfection — but just how wanton did her husband expect her to be? His delicate taste could so easily be offended. Gradually she came to see what was wrong. Not only did she not love him, but neither did he love her. Perhaps that was why Elsie had jumped out of the window. Perhaps Elsie had been more emotional than she, Magda, was. Perhaps the fact that she had no taste dulled other perceptions as well. At any rate, she had no intention of jumping out of a window. Her first marriage had not been all sweetness and light. She supposed very few marriages were. The trouble was a nebulous one, possibly imaginary. She was healthy, wealthy, and if you couldn't be wise could you help it? Magda had character and, wisely, decided cheerfully to make the best of things.

There is something about the New Year that stimulates housewives in New York City into redecorating. The holiday spirit remains, the plans can be made and the work done while they are away in Florida or on a cruise, and the income tax is not quite due. Such a stimulus had come to Mrs. St. Clair Van Allen and when that happens it does not involve peanuts.

Mrs. Martha Webster was seriously distraught. "Magda, darling, for a decorator I have committed the unforgivable sin."

"What's the matter?"

"I've forgotten a man's name."

"I suppose it has to do with Mrs. Van Allen."

"How clever of you! That job will pay the rent for five years — and I forget the man's name!"

"If you'll calm down, I'll call her up and ask her."

"Are you mad? You have no business sense. You have no taste. You are just beautiful — and sweet. Listen. She said I want the furniture by Imperatori — some name like that. She had a little clipping about him from the *Times* last April. I pretended to know all about him. We can't have her order direct."

"So? I, having no business judgment and no taste, will run down to the public library and read the New York *Times* for the month of April last year. I have sharp eyes."

"That is simple. Wait, it is simpler than that. I cannot remember the name — maybe it was nothing like Imperatori. But the date was April 10."

"Hah! I can remember that," Magda said. "That was when Walter

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sailed for Europe. I will find it, darling, never fear."

And she did. But not before she had found another item, a strange and disturbing item, also small and hidden in the back pages. It was datelined Baltimore, April 10, and it said in its entirety: "Miss Elsie Snider, of this city, jumped or fell from her room on the fifteenth floor of the Lord Baltimore Hotel sometime during the night. Her body was found this morning lodged on the grating over the hotel dining room and was identified by her mother, Mrs. William Snider, of 1209 Grove Street, West Baltimore."

Walking back through Forty-Second Street and up Madison Avenue, the two news items carefully copied and in her handbag, she decided that she was being childish. And yet. And yet . . .

"Did you get it?" Martha Webster asked.

"What, darling? Oh, yes. I got it. Shall I write or cable him?"

"I will do it. You look more out-of-the-worldish than usual."

Magda went through the rest of the day in a haze. She couldn't erase it from her mind. Miss Elsie Snider — Elsie — the fifteenth floor of the Lord Baltimore Hotel. Coincidence? Of course it was coincidence! The other Elsie — Elsie Brand — had jumped or fallen years ago. He had said he had been lonely for years. Probably the fifteenth floor was the highest in the hotel. Suicides did that, didn't they? She didn't know much about suicides, but the chills kept running up and down her back. She could remember how he looked when he told her, sad and courageous, blaming himself. She could taste the deviled crabmeat she had been eating when he told her. The fifteenth floor of the Lord Baltimore Hotel. Deviled crab was a specialty of Baltimore, wasn't it? And she remembered the ringed date, April 3, the first day of the week in which she had been transformed and which had ended on the tenth when Walter sailed for Europe — the very same day Elsie Snider had been found. She stood up suddenly. "I am behafing like a Hungarian!" she said aloud.

Martha Webster surveyed her thoughtfully. "Yes, I should say you are."

"I vill show it to heem now."

"Do so, darling, by all means, whatever it is."

She flung on her furs, picked up her handbag, and rang the down elevator-button with a flourish. Afraid of a shadow! Was she a woman or a mouse? Resolutely, she marched into 507 Madison Avenue, bowed curtly to the clerks, and opened her husband's office door without knocking.

"Valter!" she said — and with the single word her resolution vanished.

"Yes?" he said without rising. His eyes, she thought, are cold as ice.

"A man," she said. "He iss annoying me. Outside he stands vaiting."

He was on his feet like a cat and picking up a sword cane. "Where is he? Show him to me!"

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"He iss no longer dere. He muss be frighten avay." How easy it was to lie when one was frightened.

Walter appraised her shrewdly. "What did he do?"

"He spoke and ven I deed not answer, he grabbed my coat, like dis, and try to pull me to heem."

"Curious," he said. "You have been badly frightened — but not by a tough at this hour on Madison Avenue. It is the first time you have lied to me."

It changed their relationship. Walter was suddenly wary and the mask of tenderness was dropped except in public. He was relieved. It had not suited him. He ordered evening gowns for her that were so décolleté that to some they seemed indecent. What he had wanted was possession and the envy of that possession. These things he had, and so was satisfied.

And what of Magda? Magda had been shocked. What wife would not have been? But shock tempers a strong character. She submitted to what had become his cruelty and wore the daring gowns with dignity. No one would have known of her unhappiness but she was determined in one thing. She was going to find out about Elsie. She thought of telephoning Mrs. William Snider. That would be simple but somehow unsatisfactory. In the end she waited until she felt strong enough and then acted directly. It only took her a little over two hours by plane and taxi to reach 1209 Grove Street, West Baltimore. It was a red brick house like so many others in that peaceful city. The door was opened by a little white-haired woman.

"Mrs. Snider?" Magda asked.

"Yes."

It was hard to do but she had steeled herself. "I am calling about the accident to your daughter a year ago today."

"Why bring that up? I remember it well enough." The woman was very hostile.

"I am Mrs. Walter Brand."

That did it.

The little white-haired lady softened. "You can come in. You're not just a nosey-Parker."

Magda found it hard to breathe. They went into a well-dusted but unused room and Mrs. Snider pulled aside the drapes. "Sit down," she said. "How long have you been married to him?"

"Over six months. I only recently learned about — about the accident."

"Well, my girl was pretty once too. Is he thinking of stopping the allowance?"

"No. He doesn't know that I am here."

"Money or no money, if you want to know whether she jumped or not, she did, and if you want to know whether he drove her to it, he did that too — just as much as if he pushed her."

"He was cruel to her?"

"Devilish, fiendish cruel and her always sticking up for him. She blacked his boots with her nose, she was that crazy for him."

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"What did he do?"

"He was bored with her. Told her so straight out. Said she didn't have the capacity for education. Told her he'd give her an allowance if she'd take her maiden name but he was ashamed of her in front of his fancy friends. I'll bet he's not ashamed of you. But I don't envy you none just the same."

"Vy didn't she get a divorce?"

"Because he had the appetite for her and she, the little fool, for him. Every two weeks or so, he'd call her up and off she'd go to New York like a dog after her master, not caring how much she gets kicked. Then after a day or two back she'd come whimpering. I'm hot-tempered, Mrs. Brand, and I wouldn't stand for it. I blame myself for that. That's why she was living at the Lord Baltimore in a chambermaid's room next to the elevator shaft, but I say to myself she'd have done it some other way she was that desperate."

"Vy vasn't he called down here ven it happened a year ago?"

"He was on the way to Europe. Oh, they got him to depose and all that. He paid for a decent funeral and the allowance still keeps coming."

"'Sank you, Mrs. Snider. I am sorry I haff these old memories recalled to you."

"I thought you were American. You're a foreigner, ain't you?"

"Yes, Hungarian, and you can feel sorry for me too."

"I do, Mrs. Walter Brand, I do. Goodbye and good luck."

Now she knew.

But what was she to do?

Slowly she realized that she must get a divorce without his suspecting that she knew. A man who kills his first wife will kill a second.

But on April 15 Walter's second payment for income tax was due — he paid on a fiscal-year basis. Such dates are increasingly important in human affairs, and this one was the cause of Walter's writing a letter. It was a very polite, well worded letter, typed by one of his useful and decorative assistants. In it he said that, a full year having elapsed since her daughter's unfortunate accident, he felt he had more than generously fulfilled his obligations and would no longer be able to mail her a monthly check. "With very best wishes."

On the eighteenth of April he had his reply. "Walter Brand: I can do without your best wishes. I never had them and you never had mine. And I am not surprised that you stop the money. Every month I was surprised that a skunk would send it. But you can tell your Hungarian wife who you sent to spy on me and who fooled me so much I felt sorry for her I would like to spit in her face. Mrs. William Snider."

So that was it. Walter smoked his Melachrino slowly. That foolish story of the masher. That was when she had found out. He remembered telling her of Elsie — it had been a dash of braggadocio which he did not regret; but he now recognized her as a foeman worthy of his steel. She did not cringe

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as Elsie had. Nor would she be easily crushed. Nor did he wish to crush her — she was much too delectable for that. It was a problem, and Walter loved a difficult problem. He decided to spend some time in the Public Library and did so, adding thereby to his erudition.

That evening they were sitting in the Stork Club. It was crowded as usual and about a hundred men had been given a grandstand view of Magda's magnificent upper bosom and had regretfully wished that they were alone with such a brazen beauty.

"Magda, darling," he said. "I perceive that you have thought of the idea of divorcing me." He was again pleased that she did not answer. He detested chatter. "Disabuse your mind. I will not permit it."

"These are, then, the Dark Ages?"

"No. Relatively enlightened. But in any age, self-preservation is the first law of nature. Do you agree?"

"I agree wholeheartedly."

"And, according to our legal code, no wife can testify against her husband."

"I know."

"To make myself perfectly clear, I had a letter today from a Mrs. William Snider. She says, crudely, that she would like to spit in your face."

"How charming."

Strangely, in this dialogue, Magda's accent did not show.

Strangely, too, the open declaration of war was a relief. They were both dangerous to each other, yet they ate together, spent their leisure hours together, and even slept together. The situation was sufficiently piquant to appeal strongly to his passion for the rare and exotic, and Magda could see the mordant humor in it. Even some of his tenderness towards her returned. But living dangerously is bound to take its toll. The fine lines around her eyes, that had made her merry when she smiled, tautened so that Martha Webster took note of it. Watching her at work one day she had the amazing thought that Magda, sweet, beautiful Magda, looked hard.

Then came the call about the boat. Walter's boat had not been in the water the preceding summer and she had never seen it, but he had described it precisely as he described everything, a 52-foot yawl so heavily powered as to be almost a motor sailer. She knew that it was being conditioned and was not surprised when the man from the boatyard called. "Mr. Brand is not here," she said. "This is Mrs. Brand."

"I tried his office, Mrs. Brand, and his instructions were that he be notified the moment she was ready."

"Thank you, I'll tell him."

"Tell him, please, that it is at the Miami Yacht Club, fully outfitted and ready to sail, and that the Cuban pilot is highly recommended."

"Thank you. Goodbye."

Again the chill, the finding it hard to breathe. This was a move against her. She could feel it in her Hungarian bones. Would he push her overboard? But why Cuba at this

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time of year? There was reason in it. A dangerous reason. She would refuse, point-blank, to go.

When he came in she gave him the message. "The man at the boatyard, Steven Monroe, called and said the boat was ready."

He looked at her sharply. "Why did he call here? Did he say anything else?"

"He tried to get you at the office and said you wanted to know the moment she was ready to sail."

"Yes. I promised those two fellows I would take them out for a few days. I'll pack now."

So he wasn't going to throw her overboard. It was something else. When she awoke in the morning he was gone and there was a note on his pillow.

Dearest: I will be gone for a week or ten days. Tell the boys at the shop to carry on. Love, Walter.

He had written her many long, interesting, and devoted letters from Europe during those months last year. It was strange now to see those words again on paper. *Dearest* and *Love*. Suddenly she felt terribly lonely and not so much afraid as overwhelmingly sad.

When he returned he was tanned, gay, and extremely passionate. He picked up a red blouse lying on her chaise longue.

"Where the devil did you get this horrible thing?" he asked.

"I made it while you were away. I like to sew when I am alone."

He examined it closely. "It is very well made. You are clever with your hands. But the material, the pattern! Have I not told you? Never choose anything yourself. It is pure Harlem."

"I can throw it away."

"Do so."

Suddenly he stiffened, walked over to the window and stood there staring out. *He is making another move against me*, she thought; *the knot is tightening. It has something to do with my bad taste. Somehow I will have the bad taste to be murdered, and he will be safe and far away . . .*

The next morning she smiled at Martha Webster. "You do not much need me today?"

"Not if you want to take the day off, darling."

"Vell, I t'ink I do."

"Very well. Have a good time." It had not escaped Martha Webster's keen ear that emotion usually touched off Magda's accent and she looked after her speculatively.

Magda walked over to the Fifth Avenue Bank and drew out her account — $4220. She took a cab to the apartment on Sixty-Fourth Street and packed two bags. The doorman found her another cab and helped her in. "La Guardia Field," she said. The doorman looked at the bill in his hand. He hated like hell to do it, she was a nice lady; but when you're menially employed, twenty buys more than five, so he made his phone call.

At the American Airlines desk she asked what they had for Chicago.

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There was room on a flight in less than an hour. "That's fine," she said, and the clerk began to make out the ticket.

"Name, please?"

"Magda Brand."

He stopped writing. "Oh, Mrs. Brand. Your husband called and said it was unnecessary for you to make the flight. I am to call him and he will come for you here."

She turned dead-white and grasped the counter to keep from falling. "You needn't call heem. I vill go 'ome."

The clerk watched her walk falteringly towards the door. Something was cooking with that beautiful dame. When next he was conscious of her, her back was towards him and she was at the United counter. Oh, oh. So that was it. Well, it was none of his business. If he had a wife like that he'd want to keep her too.

"Vot iss your nex' flight?"

"Where to, Madam?"

"Anyvare. From here. Out of here."

"There's a flight loading now for Detroit."

"Giff me, please."

"What is the name?"

"Helen Jones." She fumbled with the money and the ticket.

"Don't hurry, Miss Jones. I'll phone them to hold the flight."

"'Sank you," she said.

As she stumbled down the steps to the lower level, he was there to meet her.

"Hello, darling," he said. "Let me help you with your bags." The scream that rose in her throat would not come and, limply, docilely, she followed him out to the street.

In a cab, he looked at her with amused but narrowed eyes. "That was a mistake, my dear. I never threatened you and never will. Threats are sordid. But as long as you commit no overt act — and I consider flight an overt act — you are safe. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Valter."

He took up her purse. "Four thousand odd. We had better put that in my account. You have no need for it."

Back in the apartment, she fell on the bed totally exhausted.

She slept for 20 hours, rose, and found herself alone. She bathed and felt herself refreshed and strong again. Martha Webster saw the change.

"Whatever you did yesterday it did you good. You have been looking rather knocked out. Today you're the old Magda with, I detect, a sort of reckless glint in your left eye."

Magda laughed. "I am a little reckless and I'm drawing out fifty bucks ahead from the office safe and leaving instead a sealed envelope with my name on it. This is for you alone, Martha darling, in case of death or accident."

"Ah, ha! Well, don't be too reckless. I need you, darling, in the business. And love you, too, by the way." She kissed her. It was the first time Magda had ever known Martha to kiss anyone.

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"I vant you to send me on errands today. Errands that will take me to Long Island. Errands vich I do not haff to do."

"I see. Walter did call yesterday and sounded annoyed. Well, I am not the impertinent type and won't ask you who the man is, but I will admit I am curious."

"You needn't be. There is no other man."

"Too bad. I am very moral myself, but I love to see immorality in others."

Magda hired a Drive-it-Yourself car, a thing that Walter would not have thought her capable of doing. She drove up the East Side highway and over the Triboro Bridge, then east to the little town of Huntington. There she inquired for the Huntington Yacht Club and parked her car. It was a lovely day but not so lovely as the grizzled steward thought her.

"Good morning," she said. "Captain Wood?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered.

"I am Mrs. Brand. Have you a key for the *Lazy Q*?"

"Yes, ma'am, I have. You want to board her?"

"Yes, please. I want to see what stores we need."

"I guess most everything. When these hired crews come up the inland waterway all the way from Miami they strip your galley pretty clean. They was a good crew though. They left her in right smart shape."

As they rode out in the launch she asked him, "Has Mr. Brand seen her since she got back?"

"No, ma'am. He sent me the inventory and told me to check it so he could pay the men, but I haven't seen him since year before last."

"Don't tell him that I came out, please. I want to surprise him with something."

"I won't say a word, Mrs. Brand. Will you be long?"

"I can't tell."

"Just toot your horn."

The boat was larger than she had expected, a great deal of room below. She opened the hatches to let the early June air and sunshine in, took off her hat and coat, and sat down on a berth. So far, everything had gone well. She had not been sure the boat would be here, or if Captain Wood would have a key. She had come on a hunch. For some reason Walter had gone to Cuba, and she was sure it had to do with her. Somewhere on the boat there might be a clue.

Everything was shining. The boat seemed almost like new. But the refrigerator and larder were empty, and there were only heavy-weather clothes, life preservers, lights, tools, and line in the lockers. But where to look for a clue? Wait. Here in the drawer were the papers. Yes. Harbor clearance in and out of Havana, and charts. The *Lazy Q* had been to Cuba all right, but that was all. No hint of why. Nothing else in the drawers but other charts and implements. A wasted trip — defeat, despair.

But she had had a hunch, and she

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had it still. An Hungarian hunch. And as she had previously known, without a word having been spoken, that, as he stood looking out of the window, he was plotting her murder, so she now knew that this boat could tell her *something*.

She looked at the row of books on the shelf — tide and current tables, the Atlantic Coast Pilot, a stack of *Yachting* — and then suddenly she had a wholly unreasonable but unmistakable thrill. *American Practical Navigator, Bowditch, 1943, United States Navy Department, Hydrographic Office.* Miraculously, but surely, she knew that Bowditch, whoever he was, had spoken to her.

She took the book off the shelf, opened it, and riffled through the pages. Nothing. She turned the book back up and shook it fiercely. A printed sheet of paper fluttered out. It was page 713 and 714 of a medical handbook. It had been cut cleanly from its binding and the type was set in beautiful German Gothic.

She sat down at the chart table and copied it, translating as she wrote, leaving the proper names in German or in Latin as the case might be. Her hand shook a little but she forced herself not to hurry, to be precise and careful. The margin of one paragraph had been marked but she copied every word on both sides of the page, returned it to her dear friend, Bowditch, and returned him to his place on the shelf. She closed the forward hatch and latched it, blew the horn three times, closed the after hatch and locked it. As the launch approached she lit a cigarette, drew hard, and blew out a deep breath.

"I wasn't long, was I, Captain Wood?" and she gave him a dazzling smile that warmed his old bones to the marrow. As he helped her onto the dock and took the key, he wished that this lovely vision would linger; but she ran up the ramp and through the Clubhouse to her car. He was a nice old man, but she couldn't get away fast enough.

She parked again on a quiet country road, took out her paper and read it carefully. She had not needed to copy it all. The marked paragraph was it. Marking passages was a habit of Walter's. It was efficient if one needed the passage again. "Digitonin is a harmless though expensive drug, almost identical with saponin which, at far less cost, performs the same function as a heart depressant or sleeping draught. Digitonin, like its antithesis, digitalis, is extracted from the leaves of the foxglove. As far as has been determined, the only difference in the action of digitonin and saponin is in the former's use together with pseudaconitine, the most lethal of poisons. Pseudaconitine is extracted from the root of aconitum ferox, native to Nepal and Cuba. It is so violent in its action that anything larger than the most minute dose attacks the whole system, involving vomiting and pain so great that the injection of the poison is immediately apparent and the victim may be, but rarely is,

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saved. However, in conjunction with digitonin, an extremely minute dose of pseudaconitine, a thirty-second of a grain, introduced into the blood stream, will have no effect whatever upon other vital parts. But when it reaches the heart, the heart will cease to beat, from syncope."

Well, she thought, this explained Cuba. She could imagine that it would be difficult for even Walter to purchase pseudaconitine at a drug store in New York. But where did her bad taste fit in? She would have to watch herself.

When she returned to the office at 3 she found Martha Webster unaccustomedly agitated. "What is the matter with that husband of yours? He has been here twice and telephoned at least a dozen times. He is like a wild man. *He* seems to think you have a secret lover."

"What did you tell him?"

"That you had gone out on errands."

"Well, so I did. And accomplished one."

The telephone rang and Martha answered it. "Walter," she said, "I think you are behaving abnormally. When I hear your voice I should hang up. But your little wife is here, not in the least the worse for wear, very calm, very composed, and very beautiful. No. She thinks you are disgraceful too. She doesn't want to speak to you. Goodbye."

In the war of nerves, Walter knew he had sustained a defeat. A victory yesterday, a defeat today. He decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

"I'm sorry, darling," he said as she came in the door. "After yesterday, I was upset. I irritated Martha needlessly. And was very much relieved when she told me you had returned."

"It does not matter, Walter."

"Where had you been?"

"As she told you. Errands. I haff bad taste, remember Valter? I make drawings and do errands. Zat iss all."

She was the picture of innocence.

"I was wrong yesterday about your money. I will deposit it in your name in the morning."

"It iss my money."

"What would you like to do tonight?"

"I vould like to go to the house of friends. But ve haff no friends."

"You know I am not the gregarious type. Most of the human race is too stupid to live."

"And I am too stupid to liff, eh, Valter?"

"I don't know what's got into you. I don't know what gave you the idea of running away. You have everything and you know how I need you."

"Yes. You have use for me."

"We will go to the Copacabana. Jimmy Durante is there."

"Fine, Walter. It will be good to laugh."

She decided, while she was laughing, to attack. She drank less than usual and, in the ladies' room, asked the attendant if she had benzedrine.

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"Of course, Madame."

It was the first time she had tried it, and she found that it did invigorate her. And knowing the weapons to be used against her, she could make him fight on her own ground.

At 3 o'clock in the morning she got out of bed and turned on the bathroom light. He was awake instantly. "What are you doing?"

"I can't sleep," she answered. "Haff we no sleeping pills in the house?"

"I never needed a sleeping pill in my life."

"I need one now. There was too much noise all night and my head goes round and round."

He was fully awake now and there was a timbre in his voice that both chilled and thrilled her. "Take a couple of aspirins," he said, "and come to bed. Tomorrow I will get you sleeping pills."

The next evening he did bring her the drug — not pills but a whitish liquid in a green bottle.

"It was highly recommended," he said, "as being nonhabit forming and they said it induced a restful sleep in minutes rather than an hour. This little half-gram top is the dose and you drink it just before you want to sleep."

That night she put on her loveliest white satin nightgown and sat at the mirror brushing her hair. Would the nightgown be her shroud? Perhaps. A thirty-second of a grain of pseudaconitine — surely hardly a drop — and she would die in her sleep. She was resigned to it. One does not win a battle without incurring risks. With half-closed eyes he watched her take up the bottle, fill the cap with a steady hand, and then swallow the drug.

"Good night, Valter," she said, turning out the lamp and lying back. In five minutes he could tell that she was fast asleep.

She was not surprised to wake up and find the sun streaming through the windows. A sudden unexplained heart attack would have seemed strange to Mrs. Webster who knew how healthy and strong she was.

"Your sleeping medicine was wonderful, Walter. I have never had a better night's rest. It is all right to take it every night?"

"Perfectly safe, they assured me."

"Good! Then I will do that."

"It's just as well, because you will be alone for a week or so. I must go to the west coast to look at a rosewood secretary and a few other things."

"Oh?"

"That one of ours in the living room is too small and unimportant."

"I thought you liked it."

"It's a good piece. I have nothing but good pieces. But the one being offered at private sale in San Francisco is reported to be fabulous. I will pick out something for you to sew while I am away."

The pieces were falling into place. The picture on the puzzle was emerging. *Magda, darling*, she said to herself, *watch your step*.

He came to her office that after-

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noon before the Twentieth Century was due to pull out.

"Here is the picture and here is the pattern. You can follow the pattern, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I can follow a pattern."

"And here," he said with a flourish, "is the material."

It was cloth of gold and there was a box of cultured pearls with it.

"It is a formidable undertaking," he laughed. "Each pearl has to be sewn on just so but, if you can accomplish it, it will be worth the effort. You will be wearing a blouse such as has not been seen since the time of the Byzantine Empire. What do you think, Martha?"

"I agree on both counts. Formidable indeed and, if accomplished, worth it."

"So. Now I must run. Goodbye, Martha. Goodbye, my love." And he kissed her. . . .

Both women looked down at the box.

"I don't blame you, darling, for looking afraid of it," Martha said. "That's six months of hard labor. But Walter is such a perfectionist. If a thing isn't perfect of its kind he has no interest in it."

"Yes, I know. Would you mind wrapping it up for me?"

"No. But I wouldn't be that much afraid of it."

"Don't vorry. Somehow I vill make the blouse."

But she did not touch the package that night or the following one. And in the meantime she went to a chemist.

"Do you analyze drugs?"

"Of course, Madam."

"This sleeping medicine."

"Very fast in its action?"

"Very."

"Saponin, I suppose. Let me smell it. No, not saponin, but we can identify it in a few hours."

When she went back, the chemist asked, "Where did you buy this medicine, Mrs. Brand?"

"My husband bought it. It does not say on the bottle."

"Well, whoever sold it to him was a dishonest druggist. This is digitonin, very effective in inducing sleep but very rare because it costs twelve times the cost of saponin and is no better — no better in any way."

"But this is not harmful?"

"Not in the least. Go right ahead using it, a half gram a night if you wish. But when you want it refilled I suggest that you get saponin. Shall I write that down?"

"Please."

So now she was not quite vulnerable. The half gram of digitonin went down the drain each night and she slept very well indeed. It had not said on the paper what happened with a very small injection of pseudaconitine alone but it had called it the most lethal of poisons. She put on kid gloves and smoothed out the cloth of gold. Could it be impregnated? It seemed harmless enough. Certainly there was nothing dangerous in the box of pearls.

She pinned and cut out the pattern.

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The pearls were to be sewn on first and she traced the lines where they were to go. When the pearls were on, the various parts were to be assembled. It was simple after all and not too laborious a chore. Where was the hidden danger? It must be in the fabric. She decided never to touch it without her gloves on.

She got out her pink brocaded kit that held her needles and thread, and then, because she had been very frightened for a very long time and perhaps because she was Hungarian, she began to laugh. Aloud, uncontrollably, until the tears ran down her cheeks. Walter, dear murderous Walter, the perfectionist. Her sewing kit had places for six needles, graduated in size. But, doing the red blouse, she had broken one and had not touched them since. Now all six needles were there. She knew him well. He could not stand a gap in an orderly row, a row of anything. She looked at them closely, saw a faint yellow stain on the point of each. Sewing the round slippery pearls onto cloth of gold? Could anyone help but prick her finger eventually? She laughed again, happily. For the moment she was safe. *You'll have to think of something else, my darling*, she thought.

In a week he called from San Francisco. Could she detect surprise when he heard her answer? The rosewood secretary was every bit as good as he had heard and it had been shipped already. If it arrived before he did, and he might have to stay longer than he had expected, she was to instruct the doorman not to allow the truckers to touch it until one of the boys from the shop was called in to supervise its handling. The old secretary was to be taken to the shop and a price of $3000 put upon it.

"Very well, Walter."

"Are you lonely?"

"No, I have some good books."

"Well, goodbye," he said rather harshly, and hung up.

A week later he called again and this time was quite brusque. Had the secretary arrived? No. But they had called and it was due tomorrow. Everything was arranged.

"How are you doing with the blouse?"

"Oh, fair. It goes slowly. Such careful work, you know."

"I would like it if you had it finished and wore it the night I get home."

"If doubt if that can be done. I get bored with it sometimes."

"Damn it! I spent a great deal of money. Those are real pearls, Magda."

"I know, Walter. That's why I wouldn't want to rush it."

He hung up without a word, and Magda smiled.

The secretary was very heavy. Four men carried it with effort while the assistant from the shop sweated blood and died a thousand deaths for fear it would be scratched. Even so, when they set it down it rested on one leg for a moment and there was a sharp crack. "My God," said the assistant

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from the shop, turning pale. "It was my responsibility. He will never forgive me. It is an absolute masterpiece and you know how he feels about repairs."

"There, there," Magda comforted him. "It seems solid enough. And it won't be moved again for a long time. If it is a masterpiece Walter will want to keep it for himself."

"Yes, I suppose so. It only shows if you inspect it closely. If I tried to touch it up he would know it was my fault. Those clumsy brutes. Will you tell him it happened in transit?"

"Of course. It could have, three thousand miles. Don't worry."

It has been said that Magda, though she had no taste, was clever with her hands. And so, although she was no carpenter, she conceived it her duty to her husband to fix that leg. Using only a thin-bladed knife meant for cutting cardboard, she did manage to repair the leg; then with shellac and wax she fixed it so that unless you inspected it very carefully you could not see the crack.

Then she turned diligently to making the world. Absolute perfection!"

Unless you inspected it closely . . . but trust Walter to do just that. He was down on his hands and knees. "What the devil have they done with this leg? It was perfect."

"Dere vas a leetle accident."

"And those idiots tried to fix it!"

He reached out and the leg came away in his hand. He was so completely surprised that his reflexes failed him, and the great piece loomed over him until he leaped back; but it was too late and suddenly he was pinned on his back with a great weight of shattered glass and splintered mahogany.

He was gasping. He could hardly breathe. "Get somebody!"

"Are you in pain, Valter?"

"Get — get somebody," he croaked.

"Here iss some of my sleeping medicine. Eet acts fairy queekly. A beeg swallow, Valter."

"Ge' somebody."

"I vill, Valter. Zey are at ze door now. But firs' I sink ze needle iss besser for you."

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Brand,"

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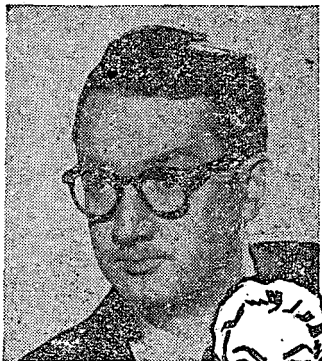

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